



GALLOPING HILL FARM A PASSION FOR BREEDING HORSES AND CULTIVATING GRAPES *by Nancy Bloomer*

Beth and I visited Galloping Hill Farm and Vineyard in Huntington, VT on a luminous day in June, the kind of day that makes one fall in love with the natural world all over again. As we drove up to the entrance of the farmhouse, we could see a lovely old barn nearby and in the distance hillsides, meadows, and woods. A gentle light illuminated the flowers surrounding the porch. The entire effect was one of beauty, serenity, and peace.

As we stood admiring the day and the farm, the owners, Meg and Ed Guilfoxy, came out to greet us. Animated conversation ensued and continued until we left two hours later. It was a pleasure to visit with people who are so enthusiastic about their lives, their work, their family, and their community. We felt drawn into the stories they told about themselves and their hopes for the future.

The farm has two distinct components. One part is Meg's horse breeding operation and the other is Ed's vineyard. While disparate agricultural ventures, they blend together in this couple's common life and include their grown children, who live nearby.

Meg explained her part of the family business this way:

"I was raised on a horse farm in New Jersey, sharing a passion for horses with my father, who was a great horseman. Together we bought and trained some wonderful horses and ponies who were very successful in the show ring as hunters and jumpers and as event horses and fox hunters.

After I married and we moved to Vermont, I continued buying and breeding po-



At Left: The entrance to the stable, which was once a dairy barn. Mare and foal under the shelter of the barn. The farm had three new foals and one more on the way. The Galloping Hill Farm sign. The house. Above: Ed and Meg Guilfooy. Mares and two week old foals in the pasture. Meg will raise the foals until they are three or four years old. Currently she has fourteen horses.

nies and horses, training and teaching. Many of those horses have become very successful in showing and eventing. My main interest in teaching is getting horses and riders out of the ring and into the countryside so that they can learn how to negotiate varied terrains, water crossings, and natural jumps. My goal is to build the confidence of the horse and rider.

In the late 1980's, when my kids were seven, eight, and ten years old and having lots of fun on a wonderful assortment of ponies, I decided to start a chapter of Pony Club for kids in our area. I started the Huntington River Pony Club, which was based here at the farm. I managed the club and was head instructor for fifteen years. Each year we had between fifteen and twenty five members, ages seven to twenty one. Every week throughout the spring, summer, and fall, they would come with their horses and ponies for a day of lessons and fun at the farm. Many of the kids didn't have their own mounts, so we provided horses for them to ride; there was a lot of sharing going on. Our club wasn't the typical Pony Club (part of the U.S. Pony Club Association) in that we weren't so focused on the competition and rating of the kids; we had the reputation for being a bit 'wild &

woolly' and adventuresome. Lots of boys came to ride here because of the thrill and excitement. We had old-fashioned fun on horseback, including moonlight rides, camping out with the ponies under the stars, galloping around the hillsides, having mock fox hunts, and playing cowboys.

The goal was to give an education on the care of the horse, safety practices, strong riding skills, and enjoyment of this amazing animal, the horse. Too many kids today look at their horses just as a vehicle for winning ribbons; in our club the emphasis was on fun and enjoyment. The older kids helped the younger ones; it was like a big family. We had outstanding talent in our instructors, who were all volunteers. The friendships I had with those children have continued into adulthood. Several still come back to ride with me, and they all have treasured memories of their times here at the farm. I passed the leadership of the club on to others, but I hear that the club has become more ring and competition centered now."

Meg goes on to tell of her current activities at the farm: "We continue to breed some lovely mares who are a mixture of Connemara crossbreds and a Paint. There are certain components that I always look for when breeding. I want a



Above: Mares and foals in the pasture. The foals are the offspring of a Connemara stallion. Grapes ripening on the vine. Ed and his son Ryan started the vineyard five years ago. They now have 200 vines on two and half acres. Ed and Meg danced in the pasture while engaging with their horses.



mare and sire with great jumping ability and movement; and they must have excellent temperaments. I have several four year olds out of these mares by an outstanding Holsteiner stallion who has the top European bloodlines for jumping and dressage. These colts are magnificent prospects for the show ring or eventing. Last year I bred the four mares to a beautifully bred Connemara stallion who has lovely movement and is a very good jumper. As a stallion he has competed quite successfully and is always a complete gentleman. Three fillies have been born, and another foal is due in July. I like the temperament, ability, and size of the Connemara. They can suit a lot of riders, and they do well competitively, as well as making great fox hunters and cross country mounts."

As we walked around the farm with Meg, Ed, and their dog Minute, a Jack Russell terrier, we stopped often to admire the mares in the pasture, accompanied by their three frolicking foals born two weeks before. (A fourth one is coming soon.) Meg has chosen the little ones' names with care: one baby is called Leap because "she came jumping out of the barn door on the first day;" another is Frolic because "she is so full of herself;" the third is Lullaby because "she was barely delivered when I heard her sing out with a neigh to her mom." Meg will raise these foals and sell them when they are three or four years old. Currently she has fourteen horses, including the foals, plus boarders. Meg loves to ride. She remarks that "bushwacking is my favorite thing to do."

Ed likes to ride, too, but his focus is the vineyard. Five years ago Ed and his son Ryan decided to plant a vineyard on a couple of the farm's hillsides. Now they have 200 vines on two and a half acres. They grow seven different varieties of grapes,





Meg with daughter Braeden's eighteen month old daughter.

which were developed in Minnesota to thrive in a cold climate with a short growing season. The Guilfoys currently sell their grapes to a local winery, but they have plans to make their own wine eventually.

Ed, Ryan, and Meg have discovered that there is a lot more to growing grapes than meets the eye. Meg describes the learning curve: "Being grape farmers, we have discovered a whole new set of issues: insects; fungi; invasions by deer, birds, and other critters; the tremendous importance and challenge of weed control; irrigation; fertilization; late spring frosts; early fall frosts; and the list goes on. It is very satisfying and rewarding work, even in those years when nature doesn't cooperate. We still have lots to learn, and that is part of the fun. We have gained a whole new appreciation for the hard work and occasional frustrations involved in producing an agricultural product."

The vineyard is called Huntington River Vineyard. The Guilfoys are members of the newly organized Vermont Wine &

Braeden's charges cooling off on the hot summer day.



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Our visit over, mares and foals returned to the shelter of the barn.

Grape Council. Grape growing/ wine making is a relatively new niche industry in Vermont which, according to Ed, has potential benefits for everyone. It keeps the land open and creates new markets for agricultural products. As Meg remarked, "Everyone's goal is to put a Vermont wine trail on the map."

Meg and Ed came to Vermont in 1981 and bought "the old Brace farm," a 200 acre former dairy farm on the Huntington River. Ed was just completing his training as an ophthalmologist and was looking to start a medical practice, and Meg was eager to begin her own horse business. They came here from New Jersey where they both grew up. Ed set up his medical practice in Essex Junction and continued it until just over three years ago. Now he is retired from medicine in order to give the farm his full attention.

Meg and Ed feel fortunate that their three grown children live nearby. Ryan, a bi-vocational Congregational minister, lives on the farm in their stone guest house; daughter Braeden lives down the road with her husband and eighteen month old baby; and Bridget, the youngest, lives in Starksboro. She will be married this summer at the farm.

Meg sums up their happiness: "We feel very blessed to live here and to have our children and grandchild so close and involved with the farm. We look forward to what the future holds for us and to how the farm can bring benefit and enjoyment to others."

HARRISON

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