



# In the Saddle and Riding a Dream to Reality

## THE STORY BEHIND THE NORTHWEST HORSE SOURCE MAGAZINE

— by Sharon Aller —

The Northwest Horse Source Magazine has its roots in the heart of a horse-crazy kid with a passion to work with horses. From its humble beginnings as a local newsletter in 1995, it has become a leading educational resource for the equine community in the Northwest, while still remaining free to the reader. From the start Karen Pickering, owner/publisher, conceived of an affordable resource that would connect the equine community through the printed page. Originally, her vision was to connect horse people with events and resources in the northwest corner of Washington State. However the NWHS took on a life of its own and developed a community that stretches from the northern reaches of British Columbia in Canada, south through Washington and Oregon into Northern California and east to include Idaho and Montana.

Karen was raised on television's "Mr. Ed" and the horse classics. She wore out a couple of rocking horses before convincing her parents to find a way with their modest means to get her a Black Beauty of her own. Black Beauty he was not. An ill-tempered, shaggy, bay carrying the lines of various breeds, Karen remembers Brandy with a knowing smile. It didn't take long for her romantic ideas of horsemanship to meet reality. The dream of galloping carefree in the wind with a horse born to grant her every wish was shattered in her initial contacts with Brandy, a poorly trained, young horse who quickly figured out how much Karen didn't know. That did not deter her



Karen, age four



**KAREN MARIE BELL:**  
Karen was class treasurer in 9th and 10th. Secretary 11. Karen's life ambition is to some day work with horses.

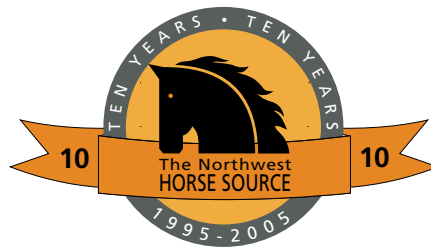
**1980 High School Yearbook**

passion to work with horses. "It helped me see my need for training, in order to develop trusting and willing partnerships with horses."

Written next to Karen's photo in her high school annual are the words, "Karen's life ambition is to some day work with horses." Right out of high school she attended Canyonview School of Horsemanship in Silverton, Oregon. Once again her dream was to be shaped by reality. Thinking that training colts was the beginning of her life dream, she soon realized that there wasn't much money in training those young, energetic and willful equine beings. Somewhat disillusioned, she took a job in the corporate world working with Customs Brokerage to pay the bills. Her dream of working with horses was relegated to a back seat.

While working in the corporate world Karen found she enjoyed working on computers to create company newsletters and began to strategize with friends about ways to incorporate her love of horses with computers. Along with long time friends, Barb Wilmore and Theresa Crume-Buck and a supportive husband and family, Karen began to publish the NWHS Newsletter out of her home after work. Within three years it had evolved from the newsletter format into a rapidly growing magazine. "I loved working with horses and I loved working with computers. The learning curve was vertical, but I realized that I was beginning to live my dream," Karen says.

Sitting back with a steaming cup of



# Northwest Horse Source

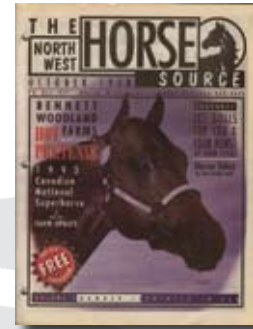
coffee paging through the first issues of NWHS, Karen reminisces about the early years. According to Karen there have been moments of sheer exhaustion working into the wee hours of the morning to get issues to press. There have been challenges growing the business and learning to develop a team to accomplish the dream. “However when the last ad is placed, the final check is done, and the magazine is at press,” says Karen, “The joy that is found in the next day or so far exceeds the challenges. The rewards come in the personal connections with other people that love horses and the realization that the information we place on the pages of the magazine helps many people in the equine community grow personally as they develop willing and trusting partnerships with their horses.” For Karen, the NWHS has not only given wings to her dreams but has given her a community of thousands to share her passion. Traveling to equine expos, horse shows and trail rides brings her face to face with the reality that sprouted from her dream. “As I meet and talk with the people who read the magazine, post events online, buy a new horse and learn to relate to that horse in meaningful ways I know I am living my dream.”

Karen is enthusiastic about the future of the Northwest Horse Source. “We are clearly established as an educational resource for recreational riders.” Hearing back from readers has “put skin on our community” according to Karen. “We are a community of people who are passionate about horses and committed to gathering the resources that help us develop meaningful partnerships with our equine partners.”



## December 1995

- Introduced as “The Horse Source”
  - 12 pages
- 1,000 Copies distributed in Whatcom County
  - 2 articles, 14 Advertisers



## 1998

- Introduced NWHS to Washington beyond Whatcom County
  - Distribution 11,000
  - Added first part-time employee
- 50 pages with growing editorial by year end



## 1996

- Name changed to “The Northwest Horse Source”
  - 32 pages by year end
- What’s Happening – community events added
  - Introduced [www.nwhorsesource.com](http://www.nwhorsesource.com)



## 1999

- Introduced Gloss Cover
- Distribution exceeds 15,000



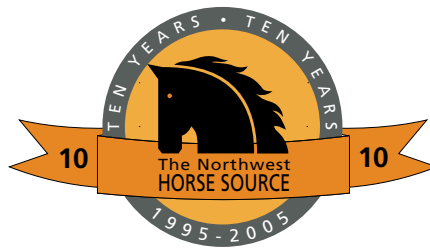
## 1997

- Distribution 5,000
- Joined American Horse Publications – committed to excellence in equine publishing
  - Owner/publisher devotes full time to development of NWHS



## 2000

- Cover: December – QH-Shugar Cat
  - Part-time Editor added
  - Distribution 17,500
- Introduced NWHS to Oregon & No CA
- First Trade Shows – Greater NW Equine Expo - Albany, OR and Equimasters - Puyallup, WA
  - 72 pages and more editorial



# Then and Now...



**2001**

- Added part-time Designer – Cover & Articles
- First Horse Affair Trade Show in Boise, ID
  - Introduced NWHS to Idaho & Montana
- Went across international borders to introduce NWHS to BC, Canada
- Jan issue reached 90 pages at height of the pre 9-11 economic boom
- Distribution 19,000



**2004**

- Tagline – Your All Breed, All Discipline, Educational Resource added
- First BC, Canada Trade Show – Mane Event
  - Added full- time sales rep
  - Distribution 22,500



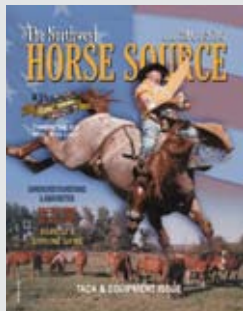
**2002**

- Comprehensive website redesign
- Distribution 21,000



**2005**

- Tragedy strikes NWHS employee - Mary's battle with cancer
- Added full time editor, office manager
- Development of Educational Resources
- Distribution 22,500



**2003**

- Moved from home office to Uptown
- Added full-time designer and receptionist
- Introduction of Equine Marketplace magazine & online for affordable advertising
- Distribution exceeds 22,000





## Today's NWHS Reader

*compiled by Sharon Aller*

Many times we wish we could invite readers in to share a hot cup of coffee and really get to know them. Over the past ten years the Northwest Horse Source Magazine has developed a community of horse lovers that now exceeds 65,000. In September we introduced a survey in the magazine and online to try and do the next best thing to inviting you in for coffee. We had a great response from readers all over the Northwest and are anxious to let you get to know just who belongs to this growing community.

### **We're All-Breed & All-Discipline**

#### **The Horses We Ride**

Quarter Horse listed most frequently, followed by Paint, Appaloosa, Arabian, Thoroughbred, Morgan, Pony, Warmblood, Draft, Miniature, Gaited and Friesian in that order

#### **We Love to Ride for Recreation – Some also enjoy competition**

64% Recreational Riders  
24% Competitive

#### **Many love Western riding, nearly half of us enjoy English, and a growing number are expressing interest in the gaited breeds, regardless of preferred style**

77% Western  
43% English  
9% Gaited

#### **We belong to a growing community**

Approximately 65,000 people read this magazine each month based on distribution of 22,500 copies with readers reporting nearly 3 readers per copy. Women and men of all ages read the NWHS, but nearly 75% of our regular readers are women.

#### **We Appreciate a Good Quality Publication**

81% rated the magazine very good or better on overall quality

#### **We Value Information and Education**

80% have at least some college education

#### **We love the rural lifestyle and prefer to keep our horses at home**

70% live in rural communities and towns with population under 25,000 and keep their horses on their own property



**We have a slightly above average Annual Household Income as horse owners in the Northwest**

- 10% under \$25,000
- 27% between \$25,000 and \$50,000
- 30% between \$50,000 and \$100,000
- 21% over \$100,000

**We all love our horses – Some even make money with horses**

- 56% own horses for personal fulfillment
- 43% derive some income from horse-related businesses

*Special thanks to Parelli Natural Horsemanship for providing a Parelli Level 1 Partnership Kit as an incentive to respond to the survey. They have been part of helping us develop as a community of equine enthusiasts. Kim McMaster of Freeland, WA will receive the Partnership Kit.*

