

## Dietrich von Hopffgarten

A Eulogy by Jeremy Steinberg

There was a "Celebration of Life" for Dietrich on the 12th of this month. I was asked to write and give the eulogy there and have been asked to share what I wrote here on my website.

A few things before we start:

First, on behalf of Kim, I'd like to thank all of you for coming and for all the support and kind words over the last few weeks.

Second, for myself, I'd like to give each and every one of you my condolences on your loss, especially Kim. Dietrich was a friend to all of us and we have all lost someone special.

Lastly I know that Dietrich liked a certain privacy. He talked often about how at peace he felt playing his piano, reading a book, making dinner, taking care of his yard and just being on his farm...quietly and privately with Kim. As the saying goes, we must, as a community accept what we cannot change, have the courage to change the things we can and the strength to know the difference. Death is a mystery and why now is the mystery we must all come to terms with. We must all find closure and cherish the fond memories of this amazing man. That being said:

I wanted to share with you a brief history of Dietrich's life and a few words of what he meant to me. I can list many people that I think would be better qualified to be up here giving this eulogy, and have to admit that when I was initially asked I wanted to say no. I was and am still extremely nervous, but realize it is an absolute honor to be up here and to have been asked to do this. It is with great privilege and pride I stand up here today sharing with you about a man who meant so very much to me. I've taken a little leeway in writing this, as I want to keep it fairly brief, and I know there are many of you who will be speaking today that will share a lot of history and anecdotes of Dietrich's life. A huge amount of Dietrich's life was private. I huge amount was also public of which he wrote with great enthusiasm in his book. Many of his favorite stories and many of his most memorable times he shared with us all through the pages of his "reflections of the life of a dressage teacher." I encourage everyone who doesn't have a copy to get one and everyone who does have a copy, to re-read it. He left us a lot of himself in these stories and through the pages of his book we are able to hear his voice. It is a small way to carry him with you, but a way in which his stories will live on.

Kim and I had a nice visit the other night and went through a lot of old photos trying to piece together important dates and times in his life. I saw pictures of Dietrich with his father, pictures of him dancing with his mother and pictures of him on horses. Dietrich was born in 1938 in Potsdam, Germany to Ernst-Heinrich and Wilfrede von Hopffgarten. I say this lovingly, but he was born a brat. I myself am also a brat, and I think it's one of the biggest reasons him and I got along so well..and fought even better. He used to use the term single minded and truly is the epitome of the definition of the word. Dietrich's father died in Russia in 1943 in the Second World War leaving him to his mother's care. Wilfriede had her hands full. We have all known Dietrich over the last few years and would probably all agree he has settled down a bit to say the least. I think back at the stories he'd tell me of his childhood years and I think it would be safe to say he was a bit of a hellyan. He did not make life for his mom easy. I like to laugh when people tell me their stories about something rude, or crass, or mean he had told them in lessons and all I can ever think is if you think he's bad now, you should have seen him ten years ago.

AND if you think he was bad ten years ago...could you imagine him as a child...I always think of his poor mother. He spoke of his first visit to Egon Von Neindorf's in 1954 when he was 16 and how when his mother dropped him off, her parting words to Mr. von Neindorf were... maybe YOU can teach him some discipline! In 1958 Dietrich spent the summer at Robert Halls in England and took it as a great opportunity to perfect his English. In 1966 Dietrich began working in Mittenwald Germany where he deepened his friendship with Uwe and Wanda Mechlem before moving to Canada in 1967. From there, the story for most of us is only beginning.

Dietrich found himself to be a restless spirit and decided in 1967 to take a one-year hiatus and travel to Vancouver Canada. During his stay he was fortunate enough to meet Jean and Cort Mackenzie who encouraged him to stay and teach dressage. He took an immediate liking to being self-employed, which in his words "suited his strong minded and independent character". With some resolution to his restlessness, Dietrich took an immediate liking to the life in the Pacific Northwest, made quick friends and maintained those friendships even to his last days. Cort and Jean have remained very special and instrumental figures in Dietrich's life. He always spoke highly of their friendship to him and got a little twinkle in his eye at the mention of their name. I remember visiting with Dietrich last year at a show here at Southland, talking very intensely with him about life and happiness, when out of the corner of his eye he saw Cort...and I tell you...I have not to this day...ever...seen Dietrich move so fast. He literally knocked me over...Pushing me out of his way; he said..."I must visit with an old friend who I owe so very much, you and I can talk later"...He left me mid-sentence standing by the arena. What Dietrich probably didn't know, is I had done the exact same thing an hour earlier...when I was talking with a student of my own and saw Dietrich out of the corner of MY eye. I know to Dietrich, Cort and Jean held a very special place in his heart in the same way, I do Dietrich.

During his time here at Southlands, Dietrich began to lay the beginning of a very vast and expansive web of his teaching. He has influenced the likes of many Olympic riders along with his even more favorite group of riders, THE HOUSEWIVES. Later those riders became affectionately known as the housewife riders club and they gave him a t-shirt with the words "president of the housewife riders club" written in black lettering on a plain white shirt. As a side note, Kim also received a shirt...Though, her shirt clearly stated "not a housewife rider". In the beginning Dietrich taught Leslie Reid, Nancy McClauklin, Leone Bramall, Gina Smith and many others. As time progressed his web started to grow and expand. It included riders like Andrea Taylor, Karen Hol and Alison Hughes here in Vancouver. Kim his wife, Melissa Beardsley, Gwen Blake, Kari McKlain, Stephanie Blockley and Lynn Dodd in Washington. Mary Ann Judkins, Mary and Spike Cornelius and others in Oregon. As his teachings started to infiltrate American soil...his web grew. He started getting phone calls from further and further away and started traveling out to teach more and more clinics. His clinics went from Calgary and Saskatoon, to Vancouver Island and Pullman Washington. From there he started traveling to Oregon, California and Montana along with other states. His web began to include more and more riders both of the housewife variety and also of the international kind. He always prided himself on his adaptability to teach anyone and in doing so, taught them all as equals. In his California clinics, he would teach the likes of Günter Seidel, Steffen Peters or Charlotte Bredahl, and after any one of their lessons he would then turn around and work with the next rider on their posting diagonals.

In 1983 Dietrich moved down to the Seattle area and married Kim shortly thereafter in 1984. I might be speaking out of line, but it would make sense to me that out of everyone, even to this day, Kim was his favorite. Never a clinic or day would go by that he wouldn't mention her name. When they married, there was an agreement struck. They would stay in Seattle for 10 years, he would help run the family farm, teach and travel, but after that he would "retire" and they would move back to the Vancouver area, to have a farm for both him and Kim that was private and peaceful. That was his dream...His Garden of Eden if you will. Together that dream came true and in 1994 the couple moved to their own farm in Langley British Columbia. During his time in Vancouver along with his time in Seattle, Dietrich helped to organize and create the PNE horse show, Judges clinics, and the Champagne Classic horse show. The latter being one of his favorite venues for showing off his side-saddle riding abilities along with how good he looked in lipstick. Seriously though, for myself, seeing Dietrich and Kim ride at one of the earlier Champagne Classic shows was the turning point in my own life. I'd never before seen riding like that of him and Kim and even though they were riding as Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins, and the tune of "Get Me to the Church on Time" was playing in the background, the magic of their beautiful style of riding was completely apparent. Dietrich organized an evening of performances to music and in costumes to make dressage more interesting and fun, and he himself rode in the evening performances each and every year. One of special note was Don Quixote and Soncho Poncho. Soncho, for those of you that didn't see it, was played by Suzy Morey riding behind Dietrich on a pony following close as he rode beautiful movements in costume. What made the ride so fun and got the crowd going though, was Suzy's untimely departure OFF of her pony's back, flat onto hers. Much in a style of which Soncho Poncho himself would have been proud, I'm sure. With her pony bolting for the door loose in the arena without her, she got up, and to everyone's surprise, started skipping and cantering on foot behind Dietrich, mocking every gesture and every movement he made on his horse. She piaffed when he did, did flying changes along side him and an extended trot that took not only the audience's breath away, but also hers. That was classic and I think the laughter actually shook the building that night...for myself, I cried/laughed so hard. Suzy, wherever you are out there, to this day I still admire your quick thinking, sharp wit and great sense of humor.

Dietrich had many horses in his life. All of which he remembered with fondness. He could tell you to this day the exact feel and personality in each and every horse. To Parsival though, he probably had the greatest admiration. He wrote a chapter about Parsi in his book, and talked about who is actually teaching whom. He would talk of how much HE had learned from Parsi, and to those of you that knew him, knew that Dietrich had a very special relationship with that horse. There was a strange unearthly quality in the way that horse would look at him. Dietrich was that horse's savior, but I think in the end, it may have been the other way around. There were other horses also, Velten, Jago, Domino, Cory, Brutus, Wasco, Moses and Demi to name a few. Some of those horses we all knew, some were from Germany in the old days that we didn't, but all of which showed his artistic and loving style of horsemanship in their personalities and movement.

In writing this, I was thinking there are many other important dates in Dietrich's life that I have missed. There were the photos of Dietrich in his first tweed cap back in 1957. There was the first photo of Dietrich with a mustache in 1976, which is still making me giggle by the way. There was the year he spent in Africa. I know he was airlifted out of East Germany shortly before the Russian invasion. I know there must be an exact date for the first time he sat on a horse. But as Kim and I looked over those photos and talked a bit about various times in his life, I was struck with the thought that the most

important dates in his life, where the ones we all have in our own personal experiences with him. I myself remember the date of our first encounter at Blackwood and the date of my first lesson. These to me, are the most significant dates I know. We all have our own timeline of touching times and moments with him. We all have dates of our own.....and those are the dates I want you to remember....Those are the important times...and to each and every one of us they are different.

Last month, we all in some way lost someone. A friend, a comrade, a mentor, a teacher...he had many titles. I think to each and every one of us he meant something different. He guided us, taught us, inspired us and loved us. Dietrich is to me, my captain. For him the flag is flung. For him the bugle trills. For him bouquets and ribbon' d wreaths, for him the shores a crowding... but we, with mournful tread, must walk the deck our captain lies, fallen cold and dead... His love, his legacy and his kind heart will live on in all of us. We will all miss him.....We will all mourn the loss of our Captain. A friend and student told me that when a ship at sea loses its 'Captain', the first mate takes control of the ship. The Captains position at the helm is never filled, but the crew continues on their journey, one man short. When the first mate stands on the bridge and sails that ship safely into the harbor, for the first time without the captain, he salutes the knowledge which he gained, and the confidence that gave him the ability to succeed. In this story, we are ALL the first mate. We ALL must continue on our journeys. In our lives we are lucky if we can know such a man, a man who could make such an impact on so many lives just from his actions. With his sharp tongue and eagle eye, he said what others only thought. His passion and love of theory was outspoken to say the least. I think of how greatly our lives have been shaped by his dedication and drive for correctness...how very much this tender heart of a man will be missed. Now at his death, I encourage you all to grieve...to remember his bark, his coaxing, his pushing and how much he loved you. Remember him with fondness, miss him with affection and love him with a tender heart. But above all else, trust everything you know about him.

I send you a gentle hug and a reminder of the great gift you have been given by being in the company of such a great man.

Forever in my heart, Dietrich I love you.

Sunday was a special day and I know Dietrich would have been happy to see such an amazing turn out and hear the stories of the so many lives he touched.

Jeremy