

A Heart Full of Horses

Badd Romance, aka "Olaf," helped Stephanie Kallenberger continue to heal from a personal tragedy, and now she is helping him heal from a career-ending injury.



**Stephanie Kallenberger's horses have given
her both healing and heartbreak.**

By Kathy A. Johnson

IF YOU'VE BEEN AROUND HORSES FOR long, you know they can both break your heart and make it whole again. When your heart is heavy, your horse can lift it, and when your horse hurts, you do, too.

Stephanie's mares are keeping her busy in the show pen. They are 5-year-old Hot N Prada ("Anna") out of Mintubee Certifiable, and 2-year-old Nothin More Ablazing ("Elsa") out of Nuthin Escapes Her, both sired by Hot N Blazing.



Stephanie Kallenberger has been on both sides of that equation: She continues to heal from a devastating loss, while she experiences both new hope and new heartbreak.

Love and Loss

STEPHANIE BEGAN RIDING WHEN SHE WAS 8, AND SHE HAS HAD a passion for horses as long as she can remember.

She showed an Appendix Quarter Horse at open shows and on the AQHA circuit while she was in high school, but once she went to college, she no longer had the time or money to show. She put horses behind her for the next 15 years, and during that time, finished college, married and started a family.

On April 11, 2012, Stephanie and husband Geoff welcomed a son, Austin, to their family of three daughters. Austin was born with a degenerative muscular condition and spent two months in the neonatal intensive care unit at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles before Stephanie and Geoff brought him home under hospice care. He passed away at home on July 18, 2012, in Stephanie's arms.

After Austin's death, Stephanie found herself in an angry, sorrowful place. She remembers sitting in front of her pastor, tears streaming down her face, and hearing these words: "How you move forward from this loss will determine how he is remembered. Your son's legacy is completely up to you."

"Like my husband said, 'You just lose a piece of yourself.' It was a really hard time," she remembers.

When the family moved to a place where they could keep horses, Stephanie bought a pony named Buzzooka for the girls, and a Quarter Horse gelding, Expect No Regrets ("Oscar") for herself. With horses back in her life, Stephanie began to feel better.

"My husband noticed it, and I felt it, too. I was getting myself back and feeling joy again for the first time after a really terrible loss," she says. "After losing Austin, I didn't think I would find joy again."

After a lot of prayer and crossing paths with Fleur de Lis Equestrian (trainers Ryan Burnett and Lucas Appel), the Kallenbergers decided to build a breeding, sales and training facility on their property in Bakersfield, California.

"Oscar really was the key to me wanting to build a barn, show again and breed horses. I love looking at and studying bloodlines and trying to determine what stallions and mares would make the perfect competitors in each area. When I look to purchase mares and stallions, I am always looking for what I can breed and breed well," she says.

They named their facility Austin Acres Quarter Horses in memory of their son. They also started the Action for Austin Foundation to provide support for children (and their families) who are fighting for their lives in the neonatal and pediatric intensive care units during the holidays, as well as those staying at Ronald McDonald houses. The foundation covers all local Bakersfield hospitals, Children's Hospital of Central California-Madera, Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital, the University of California-Los Angeles Medical Center, Cedars-Sinai and Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, and the Bakersfield, Madera and Los Angeles Ronald McDonald houses.

Meeting Olaf

STEPHANIE AND HER TRAINER HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR A STALLION that was amateur-friendly for her to show in hunter under saddle, and possibly dressage and over fences. Ryan, her trainer, saw Badd Romance for sale and contacted the owner.

With five daughters – Bree, Rylie, Lexi, Adyson and Avery, from left – there is a lot of sass and drama in the Kallenberger household these days.



Badd Romance, or “Olaf,” lit a spark inside Stephanie when she met him. She’d always loved roans but had never found the right one for her. She describes 6-year-old Olaf as sweet, playful and calm. He was also dual registered with the American Roan Horse and National Saddle Bit associations, which are AQHA alliance partners.

“Even as a novice amateur, I was able to ride him. He’s that chill. We laughed, because we were bringing him to California, and he’s like a laid-back, surfer horse!” she says.

She planned to compete with him in AQHA dressage in 2020 and establish him as a breeding stallion at Austin Acres. Unfortunately, those plans have been shelved. Since bringing Olaf home in May, they’ve discovered that he has a career-ending injury.

“He was off when we saw him, which was believed to be from some navicular changes found during the pre-purchase exam. It was nothing that couldn’t be handled with some maintenance. Navicular changes are common in performance horses. However, upon further inspection, once we got him home, when he didn’t get better, we discovered through an MRI that he had a major deep digital flexor tendon tear predominantly in his left, reaching all the way to the coffin bone,” she says.

Since they are so new in the industry and still in the process of completing their facilities, it isn’t possible for the Kallenbergers to personally give Olaf the time and treatment he needs. They’re working on plans to partner with Denise Findley of No Bucks Ranch in Santa Rosa, California, to help Olaf heal and become breeding sound. Coincidentally, Denise owns Olaf’s grandfather, Art I Sweet.

“I’m heartbroken. But when it comes down to it, I don’t regret getting him. We are committed to doing what’s best for Olaf,” Stephanie says.

Despite her sadness over Olaf, Stephanie looks to the future with excitement and hope.

“We started our facility in the memory of our son who passed away. I have some amazing horses that I’m doing extremely well on, and Olaf’s breeder, who was as devastated as we are, has been so sweet that she is actually sending us a new baby as a stallion prospect. We’re also currently looking at adding another stallion to our Austin Acres family,” she says.

Stephanie has bonded with the two mares she purchased with Olaf. The mares are both by Hot N Blazing: 5-year-old Hot N Prada (“Anna”) out of Mintubee Certifiable, and 2-year-old Nothin More Ablazing (“Elsa”) out of Nuthin Escapes Her.

“I love my mares; they’re fantastic!” Stephanie says. “Anna is 17.2 hands of chestnut mare, and I adore her and all her chestnut sass. We are learning a ton together. Elsa is my future hunt seater, and you’ll see us compete in the futurities next year.”

In August, Stephanie and Anna won the Rookie amateur hunter under saddle by unanimous decision at the AQHA Region 1 Championships in Monroe, Washington. The pair competed in Rookie amateur hunter under saddle and Rookie amateur hunt seat equitation at the AQHA West Level 1 Championships September 25-29 in Las Vegas.

Austin Acres and Fleur de Lis Equestrian

THE KALLENBERGERS ARE LEASING AUSTIN ACRES TO FLEUR DE LIS EQUESTRIAN, which will handle boarding and training. They also plan to work with AQHA judges and trainers to hold clinics at



Hot N Prada is a mare by All American Quarter Horses Congress and world champion sire Hot N Blazing and out of AQHA Champion Mintubee Certifiable.

Austin Acres, as well as start sponsoring classes or awards at California AQHA shows. In addition, they will open the facility for layovers for other trainers who are traveling through the area.

“We want to provide that opportunity for our AQHA family. Our business motto is ‘Love God. Love People. Love Horses.’ We’re not just loving on the horses, we’re loving on the horse people, as well,” Stephanie says.

A Good Family to Be Part Of

HAVING HORSES IN HER LIFE CONTINUES TO HELP STEPHANIE IN healing her sadness. On the anniversary of Austin’s death in July, Stephanie was at the barn, and “I was in the stall with Elsa. She’s such a sweet mare. After I walked into her stall, I stood there for a second and I burst into tears. That sweet little mare, she just came right up to me and stuck her head right on my chest.

“These horses are very in tune with us, and that horse brought me more comfort that day than any human did. All three of those horses, they just have my heart. I just feel so blessed to have them. They each bring out something incredible in me, and they’re part of our family.”

And speaking of family, Stephanie and Geoff have added to their human family, too. They now have five daughters: Rylie, 12; Avery, 10; Lexi, 9; Adyson, 5; and Bree, 4.

“It’s very dramatic around here!” Stephanie says.

While Stephanie realizes that showing is a competitive sport, she loves the encouragement and support she has found from fellow horse people.

“At the regional show, a girl I just met who was stalling next to me was doing a little happy dance with me outside of the arena. It’s those moments you feel like we really are one big family, that we just love horses, and we’ve all found joy in them. We can celebrate together and also be there for each other when our horses won’t stand at cone A on the X pattern. That’s a good family to be part of.

“I just feel so incredibly blessed for the opportunities that have come my way, and even though we’ve already hit a little bit of a rough patch, I do not regret the way our path has been going.” ■

Kathy A. Johnson is a freelance writer from central Florida. She owns a very spoiled but altogether delightful 24-year-old Quarter Horse gelding named “Tank.”