

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

: E q u e s t r i e n n e

BY FRED GLUECKSTEIN

At the 1940 National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden, Miss Jacqueline Bouvier on her chestnut mare Danseuse competed against the nation's best young equestrians in the finals of the ASCPA (American Society for Prevention of Cruelty of Animals) Alfred Maclay Trophy for Horsemanship and the ASCPA Good Hands Cup.

It was a double victory at the Southtown Horse Show on Long Island that qualified the young rider to compete.

"Jacqueline Bouvier, an 11-year-old equestrienne from East Hampton, Long Island, scored a double victory in the horsemanship competition," *The New York Times* reported. "Miss Bouvier achieved a rare distinction. The occasions are few when a young rider wins both contests in the same show."

While she didn't take championship honors at the final, those that watched her ride that day saw a pretty, dark-haired girl with pigtails and wide-set brown eyes dressed in boots, jodhpurs, jacket and derby. As she jumped the fences, the young equestrienne showed courage, grace and exceptional determination; the same traits that a grieving nation would admire in Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy after her husband, President John F. Kennedy, was tragically killed in Dallas in November 1963.

Born on July 28, 1929 in Southampton, Long Island, Jacqueline Lee Bouvier was the first child of Janet Norton Lee and John Vernou Bouvier III. A second daughter, Caroline Lee, was born four years later. John Bouvier, nicknamed "Black Jack," was a well-to-do financier. Janet Bouvier was a skillful and daring horsewoman, who won many prizes throughout the East, capturing the hunter championship three times at the annual National Horse Show.

The Bouviers lived on Park Avenue in Manhattan and spent each summer in Wildmoor at East Hampton near Grandfather Bouvier's splendid summer house, Lasata, where Janet kept her horses. Her most famous steeds were a bay named Arnoldean and three magnificent chestnuts: Stepside, Clearanfast and Danseuse.



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When Jacqueline was one year of age, Janet put her on a horse for the first time. With her mother or father at the other end of a lead line, she was trotting and cantering at age three on a pony named Rusty, and Jerry, a miniature horse that belonged to an East Hampton riding stable. She took to jumping over low fences without fear. Later, she rode full-size horses at Lasata.

"Here, from the age of five on, Jacqueline, in full riding habit, could be seen endlessly putting her mother's horses, a procession of ladies hunters, through their paces," her first cousin John H. Davis wrote. "I remember how deter-

mined an equestrienne Jacqueline became as she began thirsting after blue ribbons in the many East End horse shows she entered."

"I remember going out to Lasata's stables on late summer afternoons," Davis recalled, "and finding Jacqueline, after a day of relentless riding, in the stall with one of her horses, grooming the animal with the most loving care, currying its mane and tail, hugging it, kissing it."

In the summer of 1934, Janet and Jacqueline, who was known as Jackie, won third prize in the family class at the East Hampton Horse Show. Sitting on her piebald pony Dance Step with her

Opposite: Horses were a great passion for Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis. On March 23, 1962, she took her first ride on Sardar on the grounds of the governor's house in Lahore, Pakistan. **Right:** On September 25, 1962, President Ayub Khan visits with Sardar at Glen-Ora. The horse was a gift to Jacqueline from Khan. **Below:** A young Jacqueline Bouvier, with her mother, Janet Lee Bouvier, in 1935, after they won third prize in the family class at the East Hampton Horse Show on New York's Long Island.



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right hand holding the reins, five-year-old Jackie was photographed accepting a silver cup from an official. Immaculately dressed in a riding outfit and derby, she stared into the camera with a mature and confident gaze, a portent of the woman she would become.

As is the case with every young rider, there were disappointments and setbacks. There was a photograph of a frustrated Jackie at age five leading her forlorn-looking pony, Buddy, after a defeat in a lead line class at a Smithtown, Long Island, horse show. When she was six years old, Jackie took a tumble during a

jumping class at the Southampton Horse Show. Determined to continue and finish, she hopped up and tried to scramble back on the pony—on the wrong side.

By the time she was eight, Jackie had a pony of her own. At the age of 12 or 13, she rode her mother's chestnut mare

Danseuse, a horse she adored and nicknamed Donny. Her beloved Danseuse, a Virginia-born mare sired by Runantel out of Graceful Carrie, won many championships and remained with the Bouvier family for 20 years. Years later when the mare died, Jackie created a photographic history of the mare's life and wrote a warm tribute.

"Danseuse was a family horse and every child had a ride on her," she wrote. "She was such a lady. Her coat glinted in the sun when she was brushed and shining. She knew how lovely she was and flicked her tiny feet out in front of her as she trotted. There was a soft, pink spot at the end of her nose and she would snuffle softly when she knew you had an apple for her."

As a child, Jackie liked to read and to write stories and poems, which she illustrated with drawings. However, her greatest passion during her childhood and teenage years was horses. She won the Southampton Horse Show in the children-under-nine class in the summer of 1937, an accomplishment that made the entire Bouvier family proud. In 1938, she captured another blue ribbon at the East Hampton Horse Show. By the following summer, the young equestrienne won her class at Southampton, the major horse show of the 1939 season on the East End of Long Island.

"I can still see Jackie in her pigtailed and riding outfit—top hat, Ascot tie, long leather boots," recalled Samuel Lester, who exercised horses at the East Hampton Riding Club. "She was soon bringing home blue ribbons by the box load."



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In June 1940, Janet obtained a divorce from Jack Bouvier in Nevada. While at the Lazy A Bar Ranch outside Reno, Jackie rode a mustang pony named Banjo and a more spirited horse called Wagstaff, which she galloped across the Nevada desert in a western saddle.

Later that summer, the girls joined their father on Long Island, where Jackie won every event in the under-20 division of the East Hampton Horse Show, earned two top prizes at the East End horse shows and took high honors at the National Horse Show. In the fall, Janet and the two girls moved into an apartment in lower Manhattan, near the Chapin School for Girls, which Jackie attended. Her father paid for Danseuse's keep at Durland's livery stables on Manhattan's West 66th Street, allowing Jackie to ride the mare in Central Park.

In 1941, 12-year-old Jackie again spent the summer on Long Island, where at the East Hampton Horse Show she won blue rosettes in the hunter hacks class, the horsemanship class for children under 14, the riding competition for chil-

dren under 16 and the ladies' hunter contest for the Hamlin Memorial Challenge Cup. Overall, Jackie finished in second place in horsemanship to a fellow rider named William Steinkraus, who went on to win the first-ever individual U.S. Olympic Gold medal in equestrian sport in 1968.

On June 21, 1942, Janet married Hugh D. Auchincloss, Jr., a multi-millionaire investment banker, who owned a 75-acre estate called Hammersmith in Newport, RI, and Merrywood, a 46-acre

estate in McLean, VA. Jackie grew to love Merrywood, riding on the trails overlooking the Potomac and later fox hunting in the open countryside.

In 1944, Jackie, at age 15, became the undisputed champion equestrienne of her age group on Long Island's East End. Riding aboard Danseuse, she won at all the shows at Southampton, East Hampton, Bridgehampton and Smithtown. That fall, Jackie entered Miss Porter's Boarding School in Farmington, CT, where she began her three-year preparation for college. Jackie pleaded with Grandfather Bouvier to have Danseuse boarded in the local stables, and he agreed.

Soon after Danseuse arrived, Jackie wrote a letter home.

"Every day since Donny came I've gone up and groomed her, and last night I went up to see her before the lecture. And Sue [Jackie's roommate] locked me in the stall with her. I was practically late, but it was so much fun. She is very happy in a box stall between two horses whom she kisses through the bars, and she is wearing a stolen blanket which I snatched from another horse!"

In the fall of 1947, Jackie entered Vassar College, where she joined the Riding Club, competing in horse shows, gymkhana and cross-country rides. During the school year of 1949-1950, Jackie attended the Sorbonne, writing her father that she adored Paris, where she enjoyed wandering through the Louvre and the gardens of Les Tuileries. Jackie wrote that she even had a chance to ride



Cecil Stoughton

Above: At Glen-Ora on September 25, 1962, Jacqueline shows off her jumping abilities on Sardar while President Ayub Khan of Pakistan looks on.

Right: Jacqueline riding with John Jr. on Sardar, while Caroline rides alongside on her pony, Macaroni, at Glen-Ora on November 19, 1962.

Right: Despite his allergies to horses, President Kennedy still supported his wife's and children's involvement with horses. He is shown here with Caroline and Macaroni on June 22, 1962.

a horse in the Bois de Boulogne.

Jackie finished her last year of college at George Washington University. In early June 1951, she was introduced by friends to John (Jack) Kennedy, a young Congressman from Massachusetts. In November 1952, Jackie and her cousin John Davis talked about Jack over lunch in Washington, DC, where she worked as the Inquiring Camera Girl for the *Washington Times-Herald*. Jackie confided that Jack was allergic to animal hair, especially horse hair.

"Imagine me with someone allergic to horses!" Jackie exclaimed. Both she and Davis had a good laugh over that.

On September 12, 1953, Jacqueline Lee Bouvier and John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who had been elected to the U.S. Senate the year before, were married at St. Mary's Church in Newport, RI. On November 27, 1957, Jackie gave birth to a daughter, Caroline Bouvier Kennedy. A few weeks after Jack Kennedy was elected President, a son, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr., was born on November 25, 1960.

Caroline and John Jr. had a menagerie at the White House. The most famous pet was Caroline's pony, Macaroni, which was given to her by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson. Jackie had a stable constructed for Macaroni and Leprechaun, a pony she obtained for John Jr. at Glen-Ora, the Kennedy's 400-acre leased weekend house in the Virginia countryside.

The Secret Service was concerned with Caroline's safety while she was riding Macaroni and suggested the agents follow her on horseback. Jackie objected strongly. She told them that Caroline was a better rider than the Secret Service agents, who had very limited knowledge of horses. Jackie told them that as a child she had broken her collarbone falling off a horse and that an occasional fall would happen.

"I expect Caroline to have her share of riding spills and accidents. How else will she learn?" Jackie asked.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy performed the duties of the First Lady with youthful beauty, elegance and intelligence. Whenever the opportunities arose, however, she rode at Glen-Ora and later with the Orange County Hunt. Her



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love of horses and riding became a refuge from the tensions and stress of the White House.

She received one of her most treasured gifts as First Lady while on a highly-publicized visit abroad in 1962. President Ayub Khan of Pakistan delighted her with a 10-year-old bay gelding named Sardar, which was sent back to the U.S. and stabled at Glen-Ora.

In the years after Jack Kennedy's death in 1963, Jackie found solace and happiness in her children and riding. She leased a farmhouse in Bernardsville, NJ, where the former First Lady rode with the Essex Hounds. She was pleased to see that Caroline shared her passion for horses, becoming an accomplished rider. (John Jr. had allergies to horses that were even worse than his father's.)

In May 1965, the three generations of Bouvier women competed in what would be their only joint equestrian competition. Janet, 58 years of age; Jackie, 36; and Caroline, eight, rode at the annual St. Bernard's School Horse Show, where they took second place honors in the family class event.

On October 20, 1968, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy married Greek business tycoon Aristotle Onassis. After his death in March 1975, Jackie, Caroline and John Jr. moved to the place of her childhood, New York City, where she raised the children, championed civic preservation projects and worked as an

editor for Viking and later Doubleday.

By 1986, Jackie had resumed fox-hunting in Middleburg, VA. Charles Whitehouse, an old friend, recalled, "She was an accomplished cross-country rider. When we did team events, she would lead, partly because her big gray horse, Frank, pulled if he was behind and [he] was a bold jumper. She had great confidence in him and would ride boldly over a course of about 30 jumps in four miles."

In January 1994, she was diagnosed with lymphoma. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died at her Manhattan home on the evening of Thursday, May 19, 1994. She was 64. People around the world honored and remembered her remarkable life as First Lady, young widow, devoted mother, civic preservationist and respected editor.

Others like her cousin John H. Davis remembered her passion for horses. His thoughts undoubtedly returned to those idyllic summer days at Lasata, where Jacqueline trotted around a gleaming, white-fenced ring on her mother's magnificent chestnut mare Danseuse. It was a joyful time in the life of a young woman, who later faced her personal tragedies and triumphs with the same courage, tough-mindedness and grace she displayed as a champion equestrienne. ■

Fred Glueckstein is freelance writer living in Maryland.