

Mara Coote Freeman



April 19, 1945 - April 8, 2020

Our dear friend Mara passed away suddenly April 8th, due to respiratory complications after a year long struggle with cancer. Our condolences go out to her sister Jennette Coote and her husband Barry Freeman as well as her brother Max and sister Joanne and their families. Those of us in the Warmblood breeding community knew her as a founding member of our association, an esteemed senior judge, our pioneer into the digital world as our first web master, a past national and chapter director and for many years manager of the CWHBA booth at Spruce Meadows, but that was just the tip of the iceberg.

Mara's love for the horse took her far beyond that and her volunteerism within the horse industry was legendary. For six years Vice President on the Canadian Equestrian Federation Board responsible for Breeds and Industry, founding member of the Canadian Horse Council, initiator of the Horse Industry Association of Alberta, regional representative and Board member of International Arabian Horse Association Half and Anglo Arabian Registry and more.

Professionally she used her teaching degree to great advantage. Prior to her retirement in 2015 she managed the Continuing Education program for Animal Science at Olds College and their Race Track program in cooperation with Horse Racing Alberta, which led to her current appointment to that Board. All this, while part of the dynamic duo that has operated MJ Farms since 1977.



This impressive list in no way answers the question why she was so sought after and ultimately why she was so loved, it only points to a person that was thoroughly engaged in her community. Perhaps the accolades and remembrances pouring in give us some insight. Here are a few:

“Mara was such a caring person who always made me feel welcome. I will miss her greatly.”

“You always remembered me, my name, my horses and you always had nothing but the most positive things to say and were always encouraging me along in my journey...Your infectious laugh and your kindness will never be forgotten”

"When starting out on our warmblood journey 25 years ago Mara and Jennette took the time to encourage and educate us about the "warmblood". Mara always had time for a chat and loved talking to us about everything ...Whenever you spoke with Mara you genuinely felt valued. She always listened and provided words of inspiration or wisdom."

"Your always original and informed perspectives on so many things always inspired me to learn more and be better. When I told you last week that your ability to be a diplomat while also speaking your mind was a unique gift, I meant that and more ..."

"Mara was such a passionate and strong woman. She was a kind teacher but was firm and expected the best from everyone. "

"Mara was so vibrant and full of life. She loved to travel, loved horses, loved her students, and was a devoted friend...The horse community has lost a great advocate and mentor. Her knowledge of so many areas of the industry will go on with her students and the likes of those who worked with her like myself".

The rest of the answer may be understood by looking at her multifaceted life trajectory. Mara had two great passions and a myriad of interests, which she pursued with energy. She was a traveller at a very young age. Born in Edmonton while her father was working in Columbia, she had to wait a year until old enough to get the appropriate vaccines before she and her mother could board a ship for the long journey. It was the first of many trips. Trips that took her, alone at first and later with Barry, to Europe, South East Asia, China, Costa Rica, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and many more. She didn't always take the easy route. After teaching for a year in Australia, she made her way home the long way, by bus from Singapore, through India, Pakistan, the middle east and on to Europe.



Her second passion began at pony club and never stopped. Her father Bud, was an enthusiastic standardbred breeder so MJ Farms combined their early Arabian and Anglo Arabian breeding program with breeding and training trotters. This transitioned to Trakehners and finally Warmbloods, but Warmbloods which carried the refinement and quality of an Anglo foundation.

In light of all this, it is clear that her diverse life experiences and broad industry knowledge equipped her for making an impact, but it was the power of her personality, her gift for really listening, her creative mind and her genuine enthusiasm for making things happen, coupled with her undeniable love for people that made her such a special person. Regardless of what sphere of Mara's life you were a part of, you felt her impact. Knowing more about Mara simply increases the wonder at how much she contributed, not just to the Canadian Warmblood or to the horse industry at large, but most importantly to the individuals lucky enough to be her friend, her student or her colleague.

Let us hold her memory tight. Let us honour her legacy. Let us carry her spirit forward.