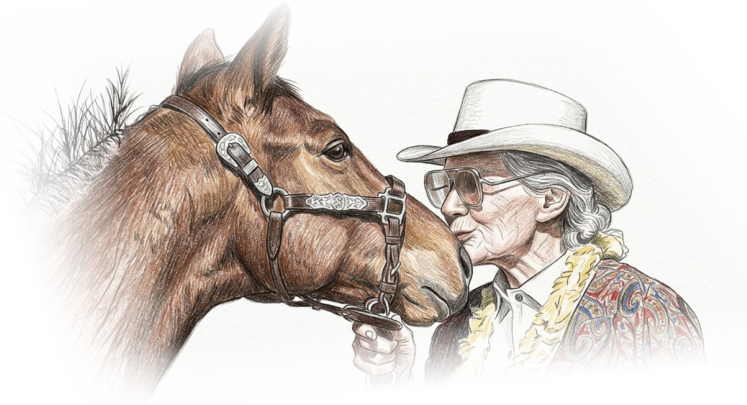


He Wahine Holo Lio

“Woman who rides a horse”



By, Wayne McIlwraith

The title of this article may seem simplistic to some people, but it is actually the perfect description for Princess Abigail Kawānanakoa, whose priority in her accomplishments in Quarter Horse racing and breeding was always the welfare of the horse.

My wife, Dr. Nancy Goodman, and I had a long and close relationship with her through our work with her and her horses. Nancy provided most of Abigail’s veterinary care at Los Alamitos from 1991 until she retired as a racetrack veterinarian in 2001. I initially got to know Abigail over the phone when I called to report to her after performing surgery on her horses. Those “reports” often turned into long conversations about her “hosses.” Those discussions soon progressed to evenings at Los Alamitos when she had a horse racing, and we were invited to dine with her. Abigail was an accomplished equestrian and became a well-respected and very knowledgeable racing Quarter Horse owner and breeder a distinction recognized by her induction into the AQHA Hall of Fame.

At a young age, she became the hānai (adopted) child of her maternal grandmother, Princess Abigail W. Campbell Kawānanakoa, and grew up mostly in her grandmother’s home. She also spent a great deal of time at her great-aunt’s home in Punalu‘u, which, as she later reflected, was where her equestrian interests began. As she recounted, “We could get up early and ride horseback to the mountains to pick rice bags full of ginger buds, then swim the horses and spend the rest of the day stringing leis on the lanai.”

She became an excellent equestrian and was introduced to Quarter Horse racing in the 1970s a passion that would define her life. She made a profound impact on the racing Quarter Horse breed as both owner and breeder. Horses running in her name had over 1,500 starts and earned more than \$3.6 million. Her runners won 220 races and finished in the top three on more than 630 occasions (according to the report associated with her induction into the American Quarter Horse Association Hall of Fame).

Abigail bred her first Quarter Horse in 1980 and, nine years later, produced her first home-bred stakes winner, Royal Trips. The six-figure-winning Royal Trips was only the first of more than 350 winners bred in Miss Abigail's name. Horses she bred have earned more than \$10.5 billion and include 44 stakes winners placing her among the all-time leading breeders, and first among women.

Among her elite breeding stock was Trippy Dip, who also stands beside her in the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame. One of Trippy Dip's great foals was Florentine, who earned more than \$1.1 million. Kawānanakoa bred Florentine to Chicks Beduino to produce Snow's Royal, who sired champion Blazen Fire and 43 other stakes winners, with total earnings exceeding \$13.9 million.

Another of her great horses was A Classic Dash, winner of the 1993 All-American Futurity. The connections were all female trained by Connie Hall and cared for by veterinarian Dr. Nancy Goodman. I played a small part by performing surgery to remove bone fragments from his front fetlock joints after the All-American Futurity. A Classic Dash became a champion earner of \$1,078,617 and went on to sire the Kawānanakoa-bred champion Royaltime Classic, 34 other stakes winners, and earners of more than \$6.7 million.

One of her other great horses was Evening Snow, who won the inaugural Los Alamitos Million in 1995. He was trained by John Bassett, and we performed arthroscopic surgery on his knees the week after the Million to remove chip fragments. He recovered well and, in October 1996, became the first Quarter Horse to break the 21-second mark for the quarter mile, clocking in at 20.94 seconds.

Abigail was named AQHA Champion Owner in both 1994 and 1995. To date, Princess Abigail's horses have won \$9.89 million on the track, producing four world champions who have won five world championships. She was honored by the Pacific Coast Quarter Horse Racing Association for her major contributions to the sport, inducted into the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 2018, and in 2021 had a 400-yard stakes race at Los Alamitos named in her honor — the \$100,000 Abigail Kawānanakoa Stakes.

At her AQHA Hall of Fame induction, she said, "Horses have always been the next-most important thing in the world to me, besides my friends and Hawai'i. What can I say? I'm catching the rainbow."

Abigail lived those words. Our relationship evolved from equine orthopedic surgeon and client to close friends, bonded by our shared commitment to the welfare of the horse.

More importantly, Abigail asked about our research at Colorado State University (CSU) to help racehorses. We shared our ongoing studies and our need for funding. That conversation led to Princess Abigail's \$3-million gift to establish an endowed university chair at CSU's Equine Orthopaedic Research Center, which I had developed to address conditions that could not be "fixed" with arthroscopic surgery alone.

The position was named the Abigail K. Kawānanakoa University Chair in Equine Musculoskeletal Integrated Therapies, reflecting her interest in exploring alternative and complementary approaches to conventional veterinary medicine. Created in May 2016, the chair's purpose is to advance equine preventative treatments and rehabilitation techniques for equine athletes.

Abigail was a uniquely engaged donor deeply interested in the details of our research, acting not only as benefactor but as collaborator. Her interest grew over time through many visits to her ranch, Lake View Quarter Horses. When she became less able to travel to California, our relationship continued through long phone conversations and visits to Hawai'i. One of my favorite photographs shows Abigail and me seated in Wayne Shizuru's kitchen, Wayne cooking, me with a glass of wine, and Abigail with her drink of choice, sake on the rocks.

In recognition of her dedication to global equine health, her contributions to orthopedic research, and her cultural preservation work in Hawai‘i, Colorado State University conferred an honorary doctorate on Abigail Kinoiki Kekaulike Kawānanakoa at the May 2016 CSU commencement. The citation also noted the university’s long relationship with Hawai‘i — at that time, 160 students from Hawai‘i had graduated from CSU as Doctors of Veterinary Medicine. I accepted the degree on her behalf and later presented it to her in a ceremony at Los Alamitos in the winner’s circle between races.

Princess Abigail was a great friend to CSU and an ardent supporter of the university’s educational and research mission. When the honorary doctorate was presented, CSU President Tony Frank said:

“Princess Abigail embodies a passion for the advancement of knowledge through objective scholarship in the pursuit of truth. She has focused that passion to contribute significantly to society and culture. We are honored to have someone with such unwavering spirit, common reverence for knowledge, and cultural values in our university family.”

The last chapter of our collaboration came with a large lead donation from John and Leslie Malone toward building what became the Translational Medicine Institute at CSU. When the Malones contributed their gift, John suggested that we find another major matching donor and even proposed that the naming rights could motivate such a contribution.

I flew to Hawai‘i to meet with Abigail and shared our vision — an institute dedicated to cutting-edge equine research with potential translational benefits for human medicine as well. She was enthusiastic and, after working with her attorney and accountant, Mr. Jim Wright, pledged \$20 million, which completed the \$65-million project. The university contributed \$10 million in addition to the Malones’ \$41.5 million, making the institute a reality.

What I had not anticipated was her condition for the gift: that my name appear on the building. It was both surprising and humbling and spoke volumes about the depth of our friendship and her generosity.

Abigail Kawānanakoa was one of a kind. To call her “unique” almost understates it, she was unique in every possible way: in accomplishment, in interest, and in communication. Unlike some others, including trainers, I was never admonished by her; perhaps as a New Zealander, I simply understood her bluntness.

I still recall one Friday evening, alone at the Orthopaedic Research Center, when she called to say that the contract for the \$20-million gift was coming through and that I needed to sign it and return it immediately. I explained that I was the only one there, had limited administrative authority, and could not legally sign the pledge. She simply replied, “Wayne, do you want this gift? If so, you need to find a way.”

And I did.