

GHM

By Alexander Grayton



I heard an interview on a podcast not so long ago with Hollywood icon Norman Lear (creator of such classic TV shows as *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Sons*, *The Jeffersons*, *Good Times*, etc). He was 92 years old at the time. He was telling the interviewer about how much he has changed since he was 85 – he’s a totally different person now than he was back then. I thought that was comical, to think someone could change and grow especially after what has already been a fulfilling life.

But why not, really? The world waits for no one, as it is often said.

George H Morris (GHM) is another icon, and at the age of 78 he has led an extraordinary life (check out his biography, *Unrelenting!*). He has trained, taught, coached, and mentored some of the world’s most pre-eminent show jumping stars of the past 60 years. Katie Monahan-Prudent, Beezie Madden, Laura Kraut, Peder Fredericsson, Thomas Fuchs, Ian Millar, Randy Roy, Conrad Homfeld, Melanie

Smith-Taylor, Leslie Howard, Peter Leone, Anne Kursinski, Chris Kappler – these are all former pupils of GHM, and there are a lot of Olympic medals floating around that group.

Over the course of his riding, coaching, training and chef d’equipe career, GHM has stayed current and adapted with changing course design, evolving horse power, increasing show demands and extravagant increases in prize money – perhaps more so than any other horseperson around.

In the summer of 2016, while competing at Thunderbird Show Park in Langley, GHM introduced himself to me as I was flatting my horse Grayt Zazu. I was taken aback as he complimented my practice and approach to flatwork. This led to an opportunity of a lifetime for me, as over the following months I spoke to GHM on a near-weekly basis in an effort to organize a trip to assist him at a few clinics in California and Oregon.

As I return from my trip to clinics he presided over at Patty Ball’s Hunterville in Sacramento and Rich Fellers Stables in Portland, I find I have an immense respect for this living legend. He has changed and evolved as described earlier, but in a way he has also remained very much the same.

I had a chance to spend a lot of time with GHM before and after each clinic day, on travel days, and during our lunch breaks, and I was inspired by his commitment to his craft. We discussed how, in spite of all of the changes to show jumping over the years, the principles of riding have not and will not change.

Dating back to the ancient horsemen of Greece and Rome, through the Middle Ages, and into the more recent recorded history, true horsemen have always followed the same guiding principles, to work in concert with the horse. The more modern schools of riding – German and French – have taken slightly different paths to apply these principles in training, but they are nonetheless the same ideas.

What are these principles, you might ask? I must first urge everyone to read books, audit or take clinics, and study through the glory of YouTube all of the videos of show jumping and riding that are available



at our fingertips. The short version, however, is that it starts and ends with understanding the horse in order to work together with them. Then: impulsion, rhythm, straightness, contact, suppleness, and collection (order depends on the school being taught).

I left my experience with GHM with a long reading list. I have ordered several of the books he spoke of already.

George Morris is one of the most influential people our sport has ever seen almost the “God Father of Show Jumping”, and yet on nearly every day he was instructing, he would speak the words “I am still learning, I am only just beginning to know.” The passion for training horses and teaching people is infectious. The commitment to excellence in every avenue is remarkable. The humble approach to life as a never-ending exercise in learning and growing is something that will not be soon forgotten.

The infographic features a central silhouette of a horse with various health and maintenance icons connected to it by lines. The icons include: a syringe for 'DEWORMING', a horse head for 'CHIRO', a acupuncture needle for 'ACUPUNCTURE', a dental tool for 'DENTAL', a heart with a pulse line for 'GENERAL HEALTH', an apple for 'NUTRITION', and a horse leg for 'LAMENESS'. At the top, the 'MOORE equine since 1951' logo is displayed with a yellow horse head outline. The background shows a horse's face in a winter setting.

MOORE equine since 1951

WINTERIZE YOUR HORSE

DEWORMING CHIRO ACUPUNCTURE DENTAL GENERAL HEALTH NUTRITION LAMENESS

(403) 226-2585 WWW.MOOREEQUINE.CA

GHM Clinic Exercise

By Alexander Grayton

The courses and exercises that GHM sets for each day of his clinics are invented and developed on the evening prior, based on demonstrating principles of teaching and training, and based on the level of the groups to be instructed. Over the course of the clinic, courses were changed and tweaked each day, as exercises expanded and extrapolated into variations – there were rarely if ever any complete overhauls of the courses in my experience.

One clinic was outside in a large sand ring, complete with a tabletop, bank, and many natural jump options including walls. The availability of course material like this was reflected in the courses set, and the principles taught were borne from the same. The last clinic I assisted GHM for was at Rich

Jan/Feb 2017

Fellers Stables in Oregon, which had a strong group of riders from Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The setting was in a covered arena (open on one side to the elements including wind and rain), with superb footing that allowed for tight turns and complex patterns without risk to horse or rider.

While each day ended up taking on a life of its own, the basic structure was consistent – begin with a discussion of equipment, flatwork theory, training theory, etc; followed by a warm up with some exercises to highlight or expand on theory and a demonstration of more complex flatwork processes

Continued on Page 10

