

# ABOUT GAYLE ECKER AND HORSES



## HORSE PLAY

- Gayle was lifted up on a horse by her parents before she could walk, then spent many happy hours riding at a local trail riding farm near Exeter, Ontario, Canada as she got older.
- She got her first pony when she was 7 years old, a little dapple-grey Shetland called *Pogo*, who shared many adventures at home and at the family cottage riding through the waves along the beach.
- Gayle and her sister started showing horses that year in the local Saddle Club shows, then moving into Arabians a few years later; the family went to many shows and competed in as many classes as they could, including both English and western disciplines.
- Gayle began her service in education early as she became a volunteer 4-H Leader for the Horse Clubs in her community in Exeter, Ontario.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- For many years, Gayle thought that a future career as a veterinarian awaited, however, her interest was more in the prevention of problems faced by horses. Her university years started down an interesting

pathway that saw Gayle do a comparative research paper on the exercise physiology and response to training in humans and horses.

- Although, once Gayle completed her teaching degree after a four year honours program in human exercise physiology, the interest in horse welfare remained and was entwined into a desire to combine evidence-based knowledge into the support of horse welfare and her teaching background helped form the desire to spread this knowledge to other horse owners. A particular experience while in high school helped solidify this desire, as two of the families Arabians came down suddenly with “grass founder.” Attempts to find help and current information resulted in much frustration as she watched the pain endured with no real remedies or understanding of the cause at the time. The lack of ability to help the horses, the lack of understanding of this condition at the time and the inability to prevent the occurrence of this in the first place, has stayed with Gayle long after the loss of both horses that were humanely euthanized.

## A LIFE DEDICATED TO HORSES

- In 1988, Gayle was hired at the Equine Research Centre (ERC) at the University of Guelph and was soon training horses on the treadmill for various projects. Her teaching background helped the ERC to develop several seminar series and correspondence courses. She first learned about endurance riding at this time, and was very interested in this, as it related back to the comparative physiology study done in university, but for prolonged exercise. She volunteered at several endurance rides as a veterinarian recorder as it was a great learning experience, and travelled to several major events to volunteer for the endurance veterinarians, gaining valuable knowledge along the way.

Comparing this to human long distance running, she wondered about the many variations being used for training and electrolyte supplementation during the ride, and this in turn led to her Master's program where she studied fluid and electrolyte balance in endurance horses and three-day eventing horses, and was able to assess this on smaller numbers of Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, and the odd dressage horse. The results of her studies made it obvious that there was a real void of knowledge within the disciplines, and she spent many hours writing educational articles and giving seminars to riders. She was then part of the Canadian research team looking at heat stress and hydration status in horses prior to the 1996 Olympics and was instrumental in assisting with the “On To Atlanta” and “Focus on Endurance” seminars.

## A PASSION FOR EDUCATION

- Equine Guelph, the horse owners' Centre at the University of Guelph, was established in 2003 and Gayle was an integral part of the group instrumental in developing the concept and creating the online courses that would be a core component of Equine Guelph. As no funding was available, she volunteered to write the proposal that resulted in funding for a new industry education program. The first online equine education offering was launched – the Equine Science Certificate, with 6 courses. This represented the first online equine program of its kind from an accredited university. The award-winning program has grown to over 20 online courses, three certificates (Equine Science Certificate, Equine Business Certificate and Equine Welfare Certificate) and the Diploma in Equine Studies and is serving horse caregivers from around the globe with 20 countries represented in the student population over the years.
- As the director of Equine Guelph and an online equine education pioneer, Gayle contributes infectious enthusiasm and tireless personal hours developing more education programs for horse caregivers. At her core, she believes that the well-being of horses can only be achieved through the education of their caregivers. Whether she is wearing her Equine Guelph hat or her own, she can usually be found teaching youth or adults something about horses. Her never-ending mission for education is helping horses not only locally, nationally and in the U.S., but throughout the world.



- Gayle wanted to develop a fun, interactive program that would help give children and families a chance to learn about horses, and *EquiMania!* was born. This youth education program has expanded hugely over the years as it became another award-winning program on an international level. *EquiMania!* was featured at the 2010 World Equestrian Games in Lexington, Kentucky and is an annual feature educational display at the Minnesota State Fair (2013-2018).

## A COMMITMENT TO EQUINE WELFARE

- Recently, Gayle completed her Equine Welfare Certification from the University of Colorado and has been working with the Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare (CCSAW) at the University of Guelph and the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society, to be part of the team to develop a new equine welfare assessment program. In January 2014, she was named as an Associate Faculty for CCSAW in recognition of the work done in this partnership on equine welfare.
- Along with her team at Equine Guelph, Gayle has been leading the development of the “Full-Circle-Responsibility” Program for the horse industry in Ontario. This program includes targeted programs to increase evidence-based welfare knowledge and practice – 2013 was the Year of Colic Prevention, 2014 was on welfare, 2015 is focusing on the Equine Code of Practice for Welfare, and 2016 will feature Equine Biosecurity, all with the intention to change behaviour of the owners in support of horse welfare. *Helping horses for life ....*

## INDUSTRY RECOGNITION

- Equine Industry Vision Award, American Horse Publications – 2015
- “Industry Builder” Award for the Hall of Fame, Can-All Breeds Equine Expo – 2014
- Reader’s Choice Award - Exceptional Equestrian Category, Horse Journal – 2010
- Top 15 Horsepeople of the Year, Western Horse Review Magazine – 2008

More about Gayle – <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gaylecker>