

My Story – By Marcia Springston Dillon

I was already in love with horses when I began riding lessons at age 7. My older sister and I are blind, and in the 1950s there weren't any therapeutic riding programs. We were very fortunate to have parents who encouraged us to try activities that weren't usually done by blind children, and were able to ride in group lessons by listening to the footfalls of the horse ahead of us.

When our lesson barn was forced out by urban sprawl, we began riding at hack stables, where we had a few incidents of being scraped off on trees, etc. So when I was 13, and my father was told by an Arabian breeder that we would be much safer training our own colt, he was convinced! My first horse, Iblis, was spooky but kind, and meant the world to me. Training him took years, because I didn't have much training myself. Up till then I had ridden western, saddle seat, and done a bit of jumping, which didn't go too well. I started taking dressage lessons in college, and finally learned solutions for the issues I was having with my Arabian.

Many years and many horses later, I began riding in Para-dressage clinics and national shows. That is where I learned about Living Letters (people who stand outside the arena, at the letters, calling the letter so the blind rider can navigate). In 1999 I qualified for the U.S. Para-equestrian Dressage team, and competed at the World Championships in Aarhus, Denmark.

Traveling to Para-equestrian shows and clinics became very expensive, so I began competing in local able-bodied shows. At my first SWVADA Show, I was delighted when Blanche Mahoney, show secretary, enthusiastically recruited Living Letters for my tests. SWVADA members have always been generous in helping as Living Letters for me at camps and shows! I really enjoy being a part of this wonderful organization.