Kyla McKown

Lab 2

Story 10 Rewrite

April 18, 2011

Word Count: 1,671

One OSU graduate knows exactly what it’s like to be on the OSU football field at Boone Pickens Stadium in front of thousands of Cowboy fans.

Amanda Carter, 45, was the first female spirit horse rider at the Cowboy’s football games in 1987. Carter said she always had a love and passion for horses since she was 5. Her love for horses continues today as a hobby and a career.

Carter’s outgoing personality implies she is just as classy as her clothes; Carter’s Ralph Lauren Polo sweaters matched perfectly with her Steve Madden high-heels. Carter grew up in Tulsa and attended Cascia Hall Preparatory School until she graduated from high school and went to OSU.

“In 1987, when I tried out for the spirit rider position, it was the first year there was an actual tryout,” Carter said. “There was an interview part of the tryouts and a riding part, and I got first in riding and second in interview.”

Carter said there was a lot of controversy around OSU about their being a female spirit rider. The judges of the tryouts weren’t sure whether a woman could handle the pressure or handle a horse on the football field in front of thousands. After all the controversy, the judges made Carter an alternative for the man next in line. Although she was an alternative, she got to experience what it’s like to be the spirit rider during the 1987 homecoming game, the most crowded and exciting game of the season. Carter had the opportunity to ride Penny, who was the horse before Bullet, through the homecoming game and every time the Cowboys scored.

“I have never been that nervous in my life,” Carter said. “I have been to so many rodeos and went out there and ran barrels just fine. I remember as much as I wanted the Cowboys to win the homecoming game that year, I really didn’t want the Cowboys scoring and me having to ride Penny across the football field.”

Carter then said she will never forget the look on some of the children’s faces when she was going down the road with the parade. Carter said there was a section at the parade for special education students that she noticed when she was riding Penny. She saw the smiles on the kids’ faces and realized she could help people have the opportunity to have the connection with horses that she does.

Carter’s passion for horses began when her mother put her on her first horse when she was 5 and started barrel racing when she was 7. Carter said she grew up in a wealthy family that was able to provide her with extravagant things like horses, which was a hobby of her mothers. She said she realized the ability to connect with a horse and work as a team with a horse whenever she is riding.

“Your horse is always there for the rider, riding is also a time to take a break from what is going on around you and just enjoy life and what you’re doing,” Carter said. “It’s a good time to think about everything.”

Carter went on to college, studied mass communications, rode Penny and met her husband, Dale Carter, 47. They eventually graduated with degrees. After graduating from OSU, Amanda and Dale Carter moved to Kentucky, where she worked as the assistant editor in a small town called The Franklin Favorite. Carter continued to work there until she left for the hospital to give birth to her son, Gaven, 15. In 2005, Carter went back to school and graduated from OSU with her master’s degree in mass communications.

After the birth of Gaven and five years later, the birth of her daughter, Isabel, 10, the Carters wanted out of Kentucky. They packed up and moved back to Seminole, Carter’s hometown. Carter said she realized she was being too picky about Gaven’s teachers when he started school. She decided to go back to school and take a few classes so she could start teaching.

Carter said she can be found more than 75 percent of her time in the barn where she keeps her five horses, four sorrels and one palomino. The horses are watered, fed and hayed all before dinner time when she cooks for her husband and kids.

Carter talked about when she taught high school English at Savanna High School. Savanna High School decided to start a mass communications class where the students produced a newspaper. After a year, the newspaper had made copies and passed them around school. By then she had spoken with some people in Pittsburg County who were able to print copies of the Savanna High School newspaper and distribute them to the town. The paper came out semiweekly and continues being published for the town.

“Amanda has always had a kind heart,” Dale Carter said. “I told her before she started doing the equine therapy that she really does have a passion for horses and can connect with them on a more passionate level than most. She has been barrel racing for years and been around horses since she was 5 years old; if she loves horses, she might as well be enjoying it as a career.”

Carter’s friends became more familiar with her passion and knowledge of horses when she helped a family friend, Jeanetta Haley, 43, recover from a mentally and physically abusive relationship with her ex-husband. Carter said she and Haley would go for a ride every day and brush the horses and get close to them.

“I had never been on a horse but maybe five times before I started riding every day with Amanda,” Haley said. “I got a companionship that most people don’t get and it was with the big bay horse that I rode every day. It was a time where I could just appreciate life rather than dwell with what was going on in my life or what I had been through.”

The Carters moved to McAlister, where she works at the McAlister public schools. Three years ago she developed an equine therapy through the school system to help students with behavioral issues, family problems or cerebral palsy.

“I realized when I was teaching that the students I connected with the most were the ones that had a harder life back at home or weren’t able to learn and catch on as quick as others,” Carter said. “I figured if these kids had that opportunity to be a teammate with a horse and have a close bond with them like I do, then they would get to experience something they haven’t ever before.”

Carter said she was able to start the program with a few donations of horses by advertising the program and idea. The McAlister equine therapy program has eight horses, all of which were donated.

“Six out of the eight horses are retired barrel horses that have been donated by people I have known for years,” Carter said. “It isn’t every day you see a community like barrel racing come together for a good cause.”

Carter said the favorite horse is definitely the “OSU” horse that was sold in an equine auction OSU holds every year.

“One of the horses was donated to us by a gentleman that had bought a horse at the OSU sale a couple weeks before he heard about us,” Carter said. “He even has the OSU brand on him.”

Carter said she expects the program to continue reaching out to alternative education students at McAllister and some day be spread to other schools.

“I have seen in the last three years so much improvement in students’ attitudes and confidence when they leave the stables,” Carter said.

The horses available are being kept at a ranch close to McAlister schools where a small riding area is present for the students to ride. Carter said the program has about 12 students in it but will not be able to grow until more horses are donated and there is a bigger location to store them.

“I also think the kids enjoy being able to have a responsibility more than anything,” Carter said. “They ride and listen to instructions and get to reward the horses with treats at the end of the ride, I think that is just peaceful bonding time that they don’t have to worry about anything at home or in their life.”

Other friends of Carters said she is one of the most genuine people they know. Karla Jones, 42, was a childhood friend and grew up with Carter going to rodeos. Jones said she has always had a lot of respect for Carter and is amazed by what she has been able to do with her two passions, children and horses.

Dale Carter and their two children are not the only fans of Amanda Carter’s. Some of her close friends have admired Carter’s hard work for years.

Margaret Turner, a barrel racer, has grown up with Carter and has seen the communication Carter has with horses is moving.

“I think our kids have really taken up the same passion for horses that their mother has,” Dale Carter. “She’ll wake up at 6 in the morning to feed the horses and can stay out there at the barn until it is dark outside. Now cleaning stalls to me wouldn’t be fun, but I guess she really enjoys it.”

Turner said she has known Carter for years and has always looked up to her for her uplifting personality, and no one would suspect that Carter came from a wealthy family because she is always down to earth but at the same time, proper.

Not only is Carter a Cowboy, but she also has been able to use her education and experience with horses from OSU.

“I never imagined being able to do something so big for myself, I do it for the kids and the horses but I really do believe that I get the most out of it,” Carter said.

Source Sheet

Amanda Carter, feature

918-636-4884

Dale Carter, husband

918-636-4884

Jeanetta Haley, friend

918-807-0294

Karla Jones, childhood friend

918-224-6990

Margaret Mudd, friend

918-827-7377