

When preparing for the show ring, a finishing touch can make all the difference. Attention to the last detail, and a moment of reflection, most often brings reward. If you would like to provide your "finishing touch," please contact the editor.

An Appreciation for New Experiences

THERE WERE SOME YOUNG RIDERS IN THE USEF

Pony Finals who have participated so many times that they are virtually Pony Final "pros." For them, it's the scent of victory that brought them to Kentucky, and they were totally focused on grabbing the blue. For two others, it was the sweet smell of Bluegrass, the world-famous Kentucky horse country and the mere chance to experience it all. Henry Tomingas and his daughter, 11-year-old Alicia Hall, journeyed more than 3,000 miles from Anchorage, AK, to be a part of this year's Pony Finals.



And the Tomingas family found more in store for them than they expected. Of course, they hoped to do well. Henry was hoping his daughter would have a good time, a good show and experience something new during her first visit to "horse country." And Alicia had her own expectations, as well. Certainly they included having a good show and meeting some new young pony enthusiasts.

But, as often is the case, there were unexpected lessons to be learned and observations to be had. And for both Henry and Alicia, they were ones they will remember for a long time to come.

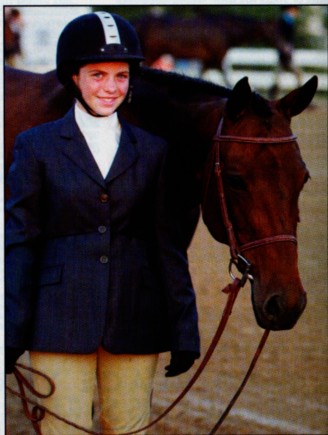
It all began with the shipping of Alicia's two ponies, a large pony hunter and a pony jumper, via air to Indianapolis. They were then transported by van—a three-hour trip South—to the stables at the Kentucky Horse Park. Alicia and Henry were well aware that this was the toughest competition in the country, and that her chances of grabbing a ribbon were, to say the least, a challenge.

But that's not why they came.

"It's really great to get a perspective on this level of competition. We can take back so much information with us to Alaska, and this can help get kids there on good ponies," said Henry. "I was flabbergasted at how many nice ponies are here. It sure would be fun for all the kids in Alaska to be on nice ponies."

While you sometimes hear "Lower 48" trainers and riders complain about footing, the Alaskans have a unique perspective and problems of their own.

"Finding a flat surface to train on that isn't tundra or rock is a big challenge," said Henry. "Usually you go to a competition up there and maybe there are 12 ponies. That's it. And, there are only two 'A' shows."



Alicia Hall and My Shiny Penny

They found a different set of issues in Kentucky. "The problem here is the heat, the ponies just aren't used to it," he continued. "But, we've had a great time. The people here have been so hospitable." Those people include trainer Mindy Darst of Lebanon, OH, who gave Alicia the opportunity to ride several other ponies while she was at the Pony Finals.

Alicia was overwhelmed by her first visit to this part of the country. "The hills and fences look like music. The grounds here are so beautiful," said Alicia, definitely impressed with her newfound Southern surroundings. "This is like my dream place. When we drove in here, I was astounded how beautiful it is. There are no pictures that can really show it."

Thoughtfully she added, "They don't have lemonade this good in Alaska either."

■ MARIA PARTLOW



Maria Partlow, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications, is a longtime equestrian. In her first year of tenure with the Federation, she has spearheaded many new member programs and made great headway in promoting the face of equestrian sport to the world. She may be reached via e-mail at mpartlow@usef.org. When not working to further the sport, she can be found training her new APHA hunter gelding, Ruling Star (a.k.a. Desi).