

A Tribute to Marney J. Walerius

She brought thousands of us together, and turned others' sneers at our "playing with toys" into curiosity and, finally, respect. She was a driving force in founding a hobby where education is exciting; where we have competition and sportsmanship, the thrill of creation, the satisfaction in a job well done. Where horses do not die, and where lifelong friendships can be made.

In the quarter-century that she helped guide our hobby's history, we have been striving hard to capture the illusion of life in miniature. The harsh reality of life is out there, but, thankfully, has rarely made itself felt—beyond the losses of sculptors Christian Hess and Rich Rudish, the hobby still seems like a joyous new endeavor, with untold fun to be had, discoveries to be made, and ideas to be pioneered. We may never reach the horizon, but think of the wonderful time that's ahead for us, trying to!

But on April 3, 1992, the model horse hobby's childhood came to an abrupt end. Marney J. Walerius died of a heart attack at age 43.

Marney did not single-handedly found the hobby; friends Simone Smiljanic (who with Marney co-founded the International Model Horse Association), Karen and Sandra Baehr (who produced the newsletter *Plastic Horse World*) and Ellen Hitchens (editor of *The Hitching Post*) were also instrumental. But that quartet eventually left the hobby for other pursuits, and for the last decade, Marney was the only hobby founder still actively involved, still reachable and answering questions, still teaching and involving others.

She began collecting Breyers in 1960 (a collection that would come to include 5,000 horses), and eight years later Marney was the hobby's "squeaky wheel," writing to Breyer's management about problems with models. The result was any hobbyist's dream come true: she was asked to be a consultant for the company, and Marney helped guide color and mold choices to improve the realism of Breyer's releases.

Informal live shows had been held sporadically in backyards and living rooms beginning in the late 1960s, and in 1973 and 1974, Marney's own backyard featured an event that would soon graduate to hotel ballrooms and grow into an annual, four-day model extravaganza, the International Model Horse Congress.

Seventeen renewals of the event were held under Marney's direction and selfless dedication. One year, she had eye surgery just before the show; another year

she slipped in an elevator during the show and broke her leg. Yet neither setback could stop her, and the show, from going on. Her body was fragile, but her determination kept her going.

In fact, Marney was seemingly made of bailing twine, bubble gum, and a will of iron. Long a diabetic, she eventually lost a leg to the disease when her brittle bones could not heal. Marney had suffered broken bones and undergone various surgeries throughout her life, and her health worsened.

Marney traveled throughout North America nonetheless, guest-judging at live shows and making herself available to help and educate hobbyists. And at the inaugural BreyerFest at the Kentucky Horse Park in 1990, Marney was presented the BreyerFest Recognition Award for years of support and encouragement to all who collect Breyer models: an OF black tobiano Saddlebred Weanling.

The ultimate authority on Breyer OF models, Marney was given a new goal to target in the late 1980s, when a Breyer reference book she had written—based on records she had painstakingly compiled since 1960—became snarled in snafus with two backers. The unpublished manuscript was in limbo for over six years, before Marney managed to rescue it.

Her deep conviction to share her knowledge with all collectors, and help them fully understand the product they were collecting, drove her determination to put everything she had into getting the book published herself. And in February 1992, a 3,000-copy printing of *The Breyer Models Reference and Insurance Guide* at last became a reality.

Two months later, having left the world and the hobby a better place, Marney was buried in Minnesota.

Her mother Elaine and brother Gary will sort through her papers as soon as Elaine has recovered from upcoming surgeries, and it is asked that hobbyists please do **not** bother the family about Marney's belongings. Contact Bentley Sales Company (642 Sandy Lane, Des Plaines, IL 60016) with questions you may have. Bentley also will handle sales of the book.

At BreyerFest, this August 1 at the Kentucky Horse Park, a tree and stone marker will be dedicated in Marney's name. The tree grows in a place she loved, and symbolizes the hobby growing from the roots Marney helped establish. May her tree, and our hobby, continue to grow and flourish for generations to come.