

## SHAHZADA 2010 – Memories for Halifax



Shahzada patron, Halifax Hayes at the Saturday morning presentation in 2006 *Photo by Col Hodgson*

### **Jill Hayes delivered the following speech at the 2010 Shahzada pre-ride talk.**

Thank you to the Shahzada Committee for extending this invitation for me to speak tonight, at what would have been Hal's 146<sup>th</sup> pre-ride talk, but this is the first time ever, in the whole history of Shahzada, that Halifax will not be amongst us, over these next few days.

It is such an honour to be here, because it gives me the opportunity to thank all of you who sent such beautiful tributes for Halifax.

Your kind words and messages of love and admiration for Hal were of great comfort to Maddie and I and filled our hearts with warmth to know that Hal is so valued, admired and respected in the Endurance Riding community.

Thank you very much for extending those thoughts and feelings to us at a time when they were very much needed, to light a way ahead for us.

I have a lifetime of memories of Halifax, many different lives did we lead together. I would like to share with you some of the other side of the Shahzada experience that I had with Hal.

Thirty years ago, we were just getting to know each other.

I remember very clearly the very first Shahzada, all those years ago. So many things have changed in St Albans since those days.

## Year 2010 Shahzada, the ULTIMATE TEST in HORSEMANSHIP

The pace was slower, everyone was younger, the light was lighter and it was an especially beautiful Winter August, not unlike the way it felt today.

Most of the hard work and logistics of the ride had been sorted out, alongside Sue May and Lyn and Adrian Bailey and the many others who then came on board.

I can't remember exactly how many horses and riders that were involved, it was around twenty, but it was an extraordinary and unique experience.

Hal had invested in a rather cumbersome video camera and would be seen in all manner of vantage points. All those hours and hours that Hal has filmed of the Shahzada's over the last 30 years... every second now valuable and precious, but then that is how I feel about every moment that I have shared with Hal.....

I am sure that many of you have wonderful stories and cherished memories of Hal and I hope you will continue to share those stories into future generations.

For me, when Hal went into Shahzada mode, he was like the benevolent General of a great army. He had an amazing ability to be able to motivate and inspire. He led by always giving people the opportunity to excel in their particular area of knowledge and interest, exhibited endless good counsel with the trials and tribulations of all who laid their problems at his thong-clad feet and always made time for everyone. He was able to hold huge concepts and detail in his head, which is remarkable for someone who spent so much of his time day-dreaming; building castles in the air *and* on the ground.

This idea that he had imagined and created and thought into life was now a reality. That first year, the few involved in the running of the ride had no idea how it would get off the ground, let alone finish.

But begin it did.

Two years after the very first ride, our daughter, Maddie was born... she was born in late July, so you can imagine how incredibly hectic that year was for Hal. Lost dogs, a brand new baby... a new family, plus the usual kaleidoscope of things always in Hal's orbit. And as well as all this, balancing major restoration work of the Settler's Arms and blasting sandstone out of the side of the mountain, to build us a home to live in. I remember those first years of Maddie's life so very fondly, we had such a primitive and simple life; no electricity, a wood-fired stove to cook on and keep us warm and we loved it.

Years rolled by and every year, weeks and weeks before the "one week" of the ride, Hal would start to lead a double life, fitting in the long list of things that needed to be done.

Track marking was a major logistical feat, depending on the weather conditions of the previous seasons, would govern the need for track clearing and all the other aspects to make the track safe for all of you... including the marking, which was an entity in itself.... then there was the firewood that for many years Hal produced by himself, until the ride got so big, it was impossible to do it all.

Connecting the showers was always a major feat, always accompanied by the usual problems with pipes, lack of plumbing fittings and gas connections. And of course, the endless refrain of the water never being hot enough... some years Hal spent almost the entire ride fine-tuning the hot -water system, driving backwards and forwards from home for yet another fitting or tool, or down to the river, yet again, to the pump. He never gave up on any problem.

He was the most patient person I have ever known.

Thank goodness for Ross Mudie. I can only imagine the gigantic ball of wire that Hal would have made with those great lengths of telephone and PA wire.

The rhythm of the Shahazada wove its way into our lives, to the point where it is one long continuum and all the years have blurred together, like a gigantic python of memories, tall -tails and endless miles and miles of video tape.

I have many recollections of Maddie, watching the Shahzada tapes that her Dad had made, over and over again, with whoever would watch them with her, to the point of smoke emanating from the back of the video player!

In the early years, a lot of the riders and families relied on their own food for the week, but again as the popularity of the Ride grew, so did the need for catering. The Macdonald Valley School, where all the local kids were attending, decided to take on the catering and for many years did a sterling job under the banner of the "Greasy Heel Café".

This title, is a Halifax Hayes-ism, alongside the "saddle friggers", "tough bananas", "that's the way the mop flops" and "old dogs for the hard road, puppies for the footpath", to name but a few.

I can hear his voice so clearly, when I recollect these.

Then there was the annual dilemma of the buckles..... "What would it be?"....."Who would design it?"

The artisan in Hal came to the fore in this regard and the original buckle, crafted by Marcus Skipper, set the standard.

## Year 2010 Shahzada, the ULTIMATE TEST in HORSEMANSHIP

Often the buckles were almost still wet with gold, being rushed from the platers in the city, always it seemed, at the very last moment....and then there was the horror question of "Will there be enough?"

You may not realise, but some very trusting and honourable riders have allowed their hard-won buckle on the day, to be recycled a little further down the line, to save anyone missing out, always with the promise they would get a replacement in a few weeks. Hal loved a bit of melodrama and could always rise to the occasion.... he was the quintessential problem -solver..... cool, fair, but always with that little glint in his eye.

He loved life. He loved the absurdity and random chaos of life and it showed.

So when I think of jelly snakes and thongs, azure blue eyes and great bushy beards and a million other things to remind me.... I will think of Hal.

All of you here tonight know infinitely more than I do about the experience of endurance riding with your magnificent horses, but I know how very deeply Hal cared about you all out there on the track and the well-being of your beautiful equine beings.

When Maddie started riding..... how could she not? .....it was another dimension for us as a family and had Hal in the role of strapper, yet again.

After doing many and various rides around the country, mostly in tow with Hal and Janine and Brooke, Maddie completed her first Shahzada in 2000.

She trained her beautiful horse Poppy, put her clothes for each day in separate plastic bags, plaited her hair and off she went.

In those days, Rob and I were doing the catering, moving into the Barn for the weeks before, during and after the ride, going to the markets, preparing healthy food and being part of the three-ring circus that was Shahzada. And that is what it felt like when the ride was over.... It was like the circus leaving town when you all left..... there was an emptiness that took a while to be filled in, with the other colours of life.

It was the turn of the millennium and a big year for Maddie.

And she was turning 17.

The ride was in July that year and it was that much colder, no hint of the promise of Spring. It was as cold as cold in St Albans.... an icy stare had enveloped the Valley. The days were grey and white and endlessly still.

Hal came down from the mountain with his hand outstretched and I can see it before me, as if it was happening now..... he had a handful of snow in his hand and he had carried it down from the part of the track that Maddie and all the other riders were riding that morning, up on McKechnie's.

I stared down at his beautiful, big hand, not really understanding and then I realised what it was and again..... how magical, gentle and romantic this man could be.

How strange and alien to imagine that Hal is not here with us tonight.

But perhaps he is here with us, amongst us.... I will be forever hoping so....

Be safe out there on the track and know that Hal will be out there with you, in Spirit.

And very good luck to you all.

Thank you for all the moments of love and friendship that you shared with Halifax..... you have all had the privilege of a most unique experience together, united for a week, as one big family. I know that Hal would have loved that.

Tonight, Hal would have also been telling you about the Moon, that it will be full mid-week, so you will have silvery, gentle moonlight helping to guide you, all the way.

A few weeks ago, I suddenly realised that Hal would love to have a special award, to honour the horse and rider who had endured something quite insurmountable during the ride.

If you knew Hal, you would know that *any* time you asked him how he was, he would *always* reply, "Fit and Well."

So in keeping with this, Maddie and I would like to inaugurate the "HALIFAX HAYES, FIT & WELL AWARD."

This award will not necessarily be for a horse and rider at the head of the field, or in the best -conditioned line -up.

We will be asking the Vets to look out for the unsung hero.

All the very best to you all.

Jill Hayes August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010