

## WEST COAST

**M**ary Lou and Terry Griffin have bred a grade I winner and sold a million-dollar horse from their homebase of Griffin Place, located in the foothills of Mt. Rainier.

*(see story on page 6510)*

JASON KATE

California

Idaho

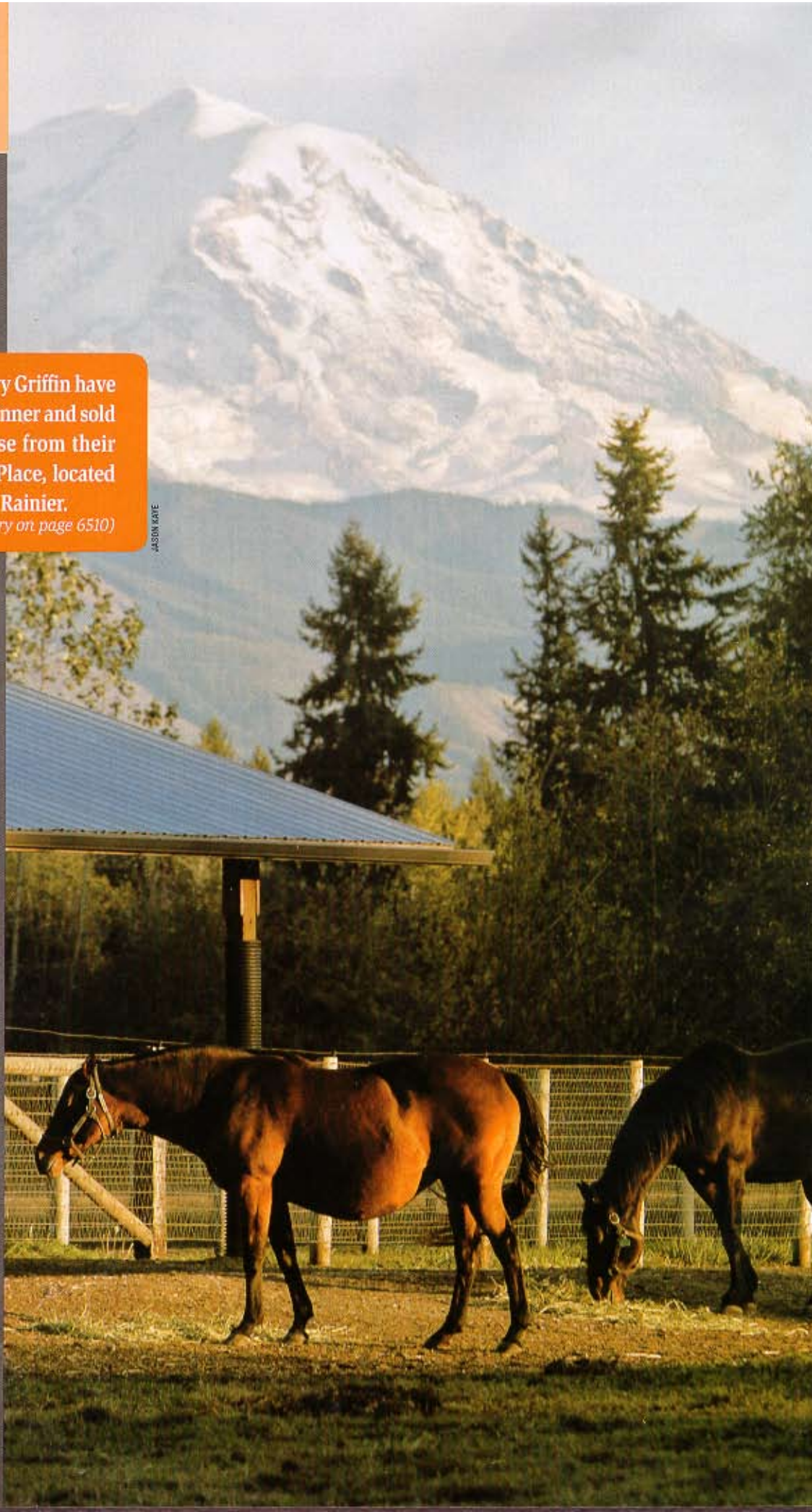
Nevada

Oregon

Utah

Washington

Wyoming







## WEST COAST

BY LENNY SHULMAN  
PHOTOS BY JASON KAYE

# Soaring High

**M**ary Lou Griffin tipped her hand early on. As a horse-crazy young girl, she got her first horse at age 7. That Paint mare followed Mary Lou through her childhood outside Minneapolis, through college at Colorado State University, through several points of call around the U.S. while her husband, Terry,

*Mary Lou and Terry Griffin prove you can meet your grandest goals in Washington*

served in the Army, and, finally, to Griffin Place Farm near Buckley, Wash. The mare lived to be 41. Mary Lou's skills as a horsewoman were evident.

In the Thoroughbred breeding business for barely a decade, the Griffins have quickly put their talent on display in that  
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Mary Lou and Terry Griffin with Best Judgement, a homebred who was voted Washington's champion 2-year-old filly in 2000



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difficult forum as well. They have already bred a grade I winner and sold a million-dollar horse. Despite their location in a distant outpost in the Northwest, they have mixed it up with the big boys and continue to thrive on 63 acres with a 10-strong broodmare band. They are proud of their adopted homeland and committed to improving the Washington breeding industry.

The couple met at Colorado State, after which Terry entered the service and they

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MARY LOU GRIFFIN

moved around the country from Georgia to Virginia to, finally, Fort Lewis, Wash. After a year in Viet Nam, Terry, a Santa Barbara, Calif., native, returned, and the couple decided to stay in the Northwest.

He used his engineering background to work for major construction companies building high rises, parking garages, and hospitals up and down the West Coast. She began showing Paint and Quarter Horses.

Fate lent a hand when a neighbor, Debbie Pabst, took a couple of Thoroughbreds to sales at Playfair and sold them for a nifty profit. "Five-thousand dollars was a lot of money at that time," said Mary Lou. "I knew I could like any horse, but I could really like a horse that's not only fun, but that can make money."

The Griffins bought their first 10 acres from Pabst in the 1970s, borrowed some money, and bought their first Thoroughbred mare. They bred her in California, and the resultant foal died after four days. Not an auspicious beginning. They then spent several years moving with Terry's

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Griffin Place, in the shadow of Mt. Rainier, encompasses 63 acres and is home to 10 broodmares

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jobs before finally settling back on the farm in the early 1990s. The Thoroughbred market was dipping; Longacres, the local racetrack, was sold; and it seemed a lousy time to get into the business.

They jumped in with all four feet.

Figuring the market in Washington might not sustain them, Mary Lou decided to buy mares whose foals she could sell somewhere else. With her friend Pabst and veterinarian Dr. Bud Hallowell, she traveled to Keeneland for the first time in 1993. "I had a lot of experience with horses before I got into Thoroughbreds," she explained. "Good conformation is good conformation no matter what breed. You look for an athlete. You look for correctness. So coming to the sale, I had no problem picking out physicals."

"I knew more about pedigrees and she knew more about the physical horse," remembered Pabst, who runs Blue Ribbon Farm near Buckley with her husband, Frederick. "We'd go to the sales together

and make a list of mares, and shop from that list. She'd buy some and I'd buy some, and that's how it evolved."

Shopping on a \$20,000 budget, Griffin searched for a mare. Her method? Look for a horse that she thinks will bring

twice her budget, and if it falls through the cracks, grab it. She fixed her sights on Outofthebluebell, a mare by Red Ryder. "She was selling on a day where I didn't think she belonged, which increases the chances they'll fall through the cracks," Mary Lou said. "She had one runner that





The Griffins remain committed to the Washington breeding and racing programs

was group stakes-placed in Mexico, which wasn't going to impress anyone, but at least showed she could get a runner, and she was a stakes winner herself, and I wanted a race mare. She also had plates and screws in one leg and was bouncing around—I don't think she ever had all four feet on the ground at once, so she was hard to look at.

"But she was a big, scopy, robust mare, and I ended up getting her for \$17,000." She was in foal to Time for a Change.

The Griffins bred their mare first to Son of Briartic, in whom they had an interest, and she produced Mr Bulldog, a useful runner who earned nearly \$125,000. Then they bred Outofthebluebell to Metfield, a Kentucky stallion, and the result was Rings a Chime. Trainer Lloyd Mason bought Rings a Chime as a yearling in Washington for \$26,000, and she was eventually trained by Lonnie Arterburn and raced by Turf Side Stables. After knocking heads in California with such monsters as Surfside and Spain, Rings a Chime won the Ashland Stakes (gr. I) in 2000, and ran second in that year's Kentucky Oaks (gr. I). She made better than \$600,000 in a 13-race career.

The instant success didn't go to the Griffins' heads. Rather than step up and buy more expensive mares and breed to pricey

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TERRY GRIFFIN

Kentucky studs, they remained committed to Washington breeding and racing programs. Because no one breeder in the state can afford to buy stallions to stand there, a consortium of about nine parties popped up that buys stallions together and then supports them with their mares. In this fashion, Son of Briartic, Demons Begone, Free At Last, Tribunal, Cahill Road, Liberty Gold, and most recently, Matty G have been brought to the state. Most have stood at El Dorado Farm, close to the Griffins' farm.

Slewdledo, by Seattle Slew, was one of the best stallions Washington has seen for years, but his recent death left an opening that Matty G hopefully will fill. "There are a lot of Slewdledo mares here now and Matty G fits the niche well. He gets 2-year-olds and sprinters, and we thought he would be a good fit. In the Northwest we typically have a lot of sprinters and

speed horses that are early developers and precocious," said Mary Lou. "We look for a stallion that fits our program and will cross well."

Most of their yearlings are sold at the Washington Thoroughbred Breeders Association Sale, with one or two perhaps making their way to Kentucky for auction. Mary Lou is a member of the WTBA board of directors. John Sikura's Hill 'n' Dale Farms handles the Griffins' Kentucky yearlings in its consignment.

Back near Buckley, the Griffins employ two full-time and three part-time employees at Griffin Place. They board mares during the breeding season, and handle the breeding and foaling chores before sending the mares home. The Griffins also do sales prep, and, in the autumn, have what they call their kindergarten program, where they work with young horses for a couple of weeks. Terry and Mary Lou's two children, son Devin, 29, and daughter Keelia, 26, help out at the sales, but the horses aren't their major interest.

"The kids like horses, but they don't have the passion," said Mary Lou. "In this business you must be passionate to be successful. Of course, I've been accused of being passionate to the point of being irrational."

Not surprisingly, Mary Lou's major



hobby is riding up on the Cascade Crest Trail. Terry enjoys flying Cessnas.

When Rings a Chime had finished her race career and was entered in the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky sale, Mary Lou came to the Bluegrass to watch her sell. She wasn't intending to buy a mare, but sure enough, someone put a catalog in her hand, and soon she was looking at 10 mares her friend Pabst had put on a list. Cozzene's Angel was on the list.

"She was a big, correct, good-looking mare," said Mary Lou, "and by Cozzene, which was a step up for us. When you buy in the \$20,000-\$40,000 range, you give up something, and typically I give up having a big sire of the mare. I'd rather give that up than race record. Cozzene's Angel was multiple stakes-placed at 2, and by a major broodmare sire. I didn't think we'd be able to af-

ford her, considering she'd gone through the sale the year before in foal to Awesome Again and brought \$200,000. But she was in foal late, and to Aggressive Chief, a sire nobody knows. So I thought, 'maybe.' I figured she'd still go for \$60,000-\$80,000. But we got to bidding and I stopped at \$30,000, our limit, but Terry said to go another bid. So we bid \$35,000 and they knocked her down to us."

Tocchet, whom Cozzene's Angel had produced, was a weanling at that time, and the Griffins went out to Knockgriffin Farm to see him, figuring he couldn't look like much. "But he was nice," enthused Mary Lou. "I thought, 'Wow, this is going to be OK.'" Two years later, Tocchet began winning races like he was more than just OK. The Griffins were back in Washington in front of the TV watching the Champagne (gr. I). "I started screaming, 'He's going to win; he's going to win; look at this,' and I think everybody in the county heard me," said Mary Lou, who quickly turned down an offer from Tocchet's owner, Dan Borislow, to buy back the mare.

Borislow was interviewed after the Champagne and noted he'd made two mistakes. The first was spelling Tocchet's name wrong (he was named after hockey player Rick Tocchet), and the second was selling the mare "to that woman from Washington, and she won't sell her back." Mary Lou said a friend of hers made up sweatshirts with "That woman from Washington" printed on them.

In January 2005, the Griffins sold Cozzene's Angel in foal to Pulpit at Keeneland for \$1.35 million to Eaton Sales, agent, making her the sale topper. They kept a Deputy Minister colt out of her and are racing him in California with trainer Gary Mandella.

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MARY LOU GRIFFIN





BARBARA D. LIVINGSTON

The Griffins purchased Cozzene's Angel, the dam of grade I winner Toccet (above), for \$35,000, and then sold her for a sale-topping \$1.35 million

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Named Chancellor, he ran a good fourth in his debut.

The Griffins will go racing occasionally with horses that don't sell. One year they got four fillies out of four good broodmares and decided to keep one. That turned into Best Judgement, literally and figuratively, who won three stakes at Emerald Downs and was voted Washington's champion 2-year-old filly for 2000.

Best Judgement is now part of the Griffins' broodmare band, along with her dam Bold Magistrate; multiple stakes winner Lady Beverly; Late Nite Martini; Atoyac, the dam of multiple stakes winner Keagan; and two daughters of Outofthebluebell, Campanita and Marylou's Girl.

Only 46 miles southeast of Seattle, the Griffins are concerned about keeping the rural nature of their area. Known as The Plateau, it is in the foothills of Mt. Rainier. The area is dotted with a number of small logging towns and is home to other breeds of horses as well. Emerald Downs race-

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TERRY GRIFFIN

track is only 20 miles anyway, but as in most places, development is encroaching on the area.

The Griffins, both 60, have been pleasantly surprised with their success in Thoroughbreds. Both as a passion and a business, it has proved quite satisfying for them. "We pulled out our original business plan with our accountant recently," noted Mary Lou, "and he was saying it's remarkable that we've accomplished so much of what we set out to do. You have to be lucky, and we feel lucky we've had the success we have."

Added Terry, "We had a goal of breeding a grade I winner, and we did that. We sold a million-dollar horse. There are always

goals, and you keep climbing the ladder until you win the Kentucky Derby (gr. I). That's the whole enchilada. But we really enjoy coming to Kentucky and trying to compete with the big boys. Like every other industry, there are people with the finances to support buying whatever they want. But this is an industry where a small person can do well and realize some goals and live the life."

Then there is the pride in getting it done off the beaten path.

"By and large, Washington horses do quite well at auction," said Mary Lou. "That's nice to see. We have good feeding programs up here. Recently, we went to the Washington Hall of Fame dinner where Sir William was inducted—he was a Washington-bred by a Washington sire, and he beat Round Table in the Santa Anita Derby. Washington has always produced horses that have outrun their pedigrees. I think we have a lot of good horsemen up here."

Griffin Place is a testament to that. □