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Louise Smith: Adventures in Business and on Horseback – The Former Silicon Valley Exec Is Now at the Helm of the Equestrian Aid Foundation

September 6, 2017 By [Editor](#)



Louise Smith with Daniel
Photo by Mika Younce

By Carrie Wirth

In high school, Louise Smith was affectionately named The Class Instigator. She's the protagonist you want to follow because of her independence, quiet courage and taste for adventure. At only 5 feet and a bit tall, her diminutive stature and warm smile immediately put you at ease. She's unassuming and approachable. You'd never guess her background if you didn't know it.

Born in Virginia, she spent the lion's share of her young life in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. During her freshman year in high school, the family moved to the San Francisco Bay area. Of the four Smith children, it was her younger sister, Judy, who was the equestrian. The rest of the family had no ties to the horse world. "Judy competed with hunters and jumpers," Louise said. "I didn't have any interest."

School work came easily for Louise and she earned top grades but described herself as independent and a bit of a hippie. She earned her undergraduate degree at San Jose State University in 1977 and focused her education toward a career as a college professor, but left school multiple times to pursue other interests. Louise did her graduate work at Stanford University in social psychology.

“I think I dropped out of college about six times to do other more important things,” she said. “I got involved in anti-war protests and the counter culture. It was an era of liberation and revolution.”



Louise getting ready to school Daniel at home.

Photo by Mike Pineo

Silicon Valley Comes Calling

While earning her master's and Ph.D. at Stanford, Louise came to the realization that the role of a college professor was not how she wanted to spend her life. “It's very solitary in lots of ways,” she said. “I like being part of a team, so when I finished my Ph.D. in 1984, I went into a think tank and did research studies. Then I went to a startup company that became Navigation Technologies, a ground-breaking early global

positioning company. It was intense. Think Google Maps today.”

After Navigation Technologies was acquired by hostile takeover in 1988, Louise was recruited by Apple, where she stayed for eight years. She worked in marketing and customer engagement during some challenging times after Steve Jobs had left the company. “The business was going through a lot of changes,” she said. “In a lot of my roles, I was asked to be a problem solver.”

Eventually, Louise left Apple for a new adventure at the Japanese electronics giant Hitachi. “I was part of the team that launched their notebook computer business to the

United States,” she said. “That was pretty exciting. It was challenging at that time to be a woman and ranking executive, but our team had some fantastic people.” Louise’s final corporate stints were at BEA Systems, providing services that powered internet transaction processing, and another startup, Endure, a private energy concern.

Throughout Louise’s career, she worked at companies producing products and services that changed the way we live. GPS, personal computers and the internet are embedded in the fabric of our daily lives. “I really love the learning curve,” she said. “I like to go into new and different areas to figure stuff out. In my business career, I established block and tackle marketing programs for many of the companies.”

Discovering Horses

“I had been really busy with work and one day decided I needed to do something fun; to take up a hobby,” Louise said. “My sister suggested horseback riding. I attempted to get in with her hunter trainer on numerous occasions but ended up getting assigned to Mike Pineo.”

Mike was a former tech project and sales manager who’d grown up all over the world. He’d been involved with horses his whole life and loved dressage. “He was committed and quirky and quickly converted me to dressage,” Louise said. “When I was younger I would never, ever have imagined that I’d end up in the horse world. It’s a lifestyle that’s completely changed my whole life. And that’s mostly for the better.”



Louise and her husband Mike Pineo with Daniel.

Photo by Mika Younce

Louise and Mike hit it off and got married. They bought their High School Farm in 1995 and started to collect dressage horses. She decided to retire from BEA Systems and enjoy horses full time.

As she had in school and in her career, Louise caught on fast. She got her Oldenburg mare Weltauna as a green 5-year-old and competed her through the levels to Grand Prix, earning her USDF silver and gold medals along the way. “Neither one of us knew what we were doing, so this would’ve been impossible without Mike,” she said.

“Weltauna is a Weltmeyer chestnut mare. She’s very opinionated and can get kind of hot. She really taught me respect for riding.”

Louise also purchased Walkabout, a 2002 Oldenburg gelding by Wolkestein II (Weltmeyer), as a weanling. Mike started and competed him successfully over the years. He was named the 2016 Oldenburg Horse Society’s National Champion and was awarded the 2016 USDF Grand Prix All-Breeds Horse of the Year award. “It was a long road, and I’m really proud of both of them,” she said.

Louise immersed herself in the horses for a few years, then found herself itching to take on another project. A friend told her about Hewlett Packard Foundation’s new Encore program that pairs experienced executives with nonprofit organizations.



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“I think there were 10 or 12 of us in the first year [of the program] and I was paired with Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View as a marketing and business mentor,” Louise said. “I found that I absolutely loved the nonprofit world. It was a great experience to go from working with people who were concerned with making money to working with people who were concerned with doing social good.”

After this assignment, Louise was recruited by Resource Area for Teaching (RAFT), a nonprofit that supports teachers with hands-on learning and classroom materials. She enjoyed the opportunity to be part of an organization that made a difference in how children learn.



Louise, the new executive director of the Equestrian Aid Foundation, with her dog Lilli Rose.

Photo by Mika Younce

Equestrian Aid Foundation

In the midst of this, Louise and Mike went to Wellington, Florida, to visit some friends. She was hooked. “I retired again, and we started our annual pilgrimage back to Wellington for the winter season. That was about six or seven years ago.”

But Louise was not to be retired for long. She heard that Equestrian Aid Foundation (EAF) was looking for an executive director. “I ended up meeting Stephanie [Bulger, president of the board], and chatting with Al Gray [vice president of the board] and voilà! There I was — back to being employed again.”

Louise could completely relate to the Equestrian Aid Foundation’s mission to assist seriously injured and ill horse people. She personally knew people who could have benefited from the organization. “Working to help equestrians — what could be better? This could be you, me, anybody. So, I took the leap,” she said.

Along with her new role at Equestrian Aid Foundation, Louise has a new project in Danseur, her 6-year-old Hanoverian gelding. “I’m so excited about bringing Daniel up,”

she said. "He's gorgeous, a charmer and a fantastic mover. I'm completely in love."

To Louise, the challenges faced in business and with horses are very similar. "Progress isn't linear with a horse," she said. "You think they've learned something, then they revert back to an old behavior pattern. It's remarkably the same in organizations. It's similarly important to establish trust and understanding with the horse. In a corporate culture, people have their own ways of interacting and communicating. You have to listen, learn and develop the relationship over time."

Louise explained that to make forward progress, whether in business or with a horse, sometimes you have to backtrack or take side steps to reach your goal. "You just have to stick with it and encourage things to develop in a good direction over time," she said. "There can be setbacks for sure. There are a lot of parallels in both worlds."

Margaret Thatcher once famously said, "If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman." Louise likes to get things done. She's not happy when she's idle. She prefers working, doing and having a goal. She's a woman who accomplishes her objectives by immersing herself in a new subject. Then, she puts together a program based on teamwork and encourages others to come on board.

"In my business career, I focused on building top teams and my job was to make everyone on the team a star," Louise said. "It's similar with the horses. I strive every day to improve my riding and communication skills so the horse can do its best. The more I learn, the more I realize that it can sometimes be as simple as establishing a direction and then getting out of the way. It's a fascinating challenge!"