

# THE BROTHERS BROWN

*Gene, Guy, and Jim Brown have contributed both horsemanship and leadership to the Morgan community. Brotherhood informs their teamwork.*

If you have been to any Grand National & World Championship Morgan Horse Show® since 1972, you have probably noticed the Browns' Hoss-Pitality banner in the stable area and have likely heard the announcer call out father Cecil or sons Gene, Guy, or Jim to the winner's circle. The Brown family has been to every one of these shows and for many years were regular exhibitors at the old Morgan Nationals in Northampton, the Mid-Atlantic, and many other Morgan shows and open carriage driving events. The "boys" have volunteered countless hours to the betterment of the breed and the horse industry.

Those who know the Brown brothers are inspired by their non-stop work ethic and their devotion to horses. Their friends and acquaintances emphasize the brothers' crazy sense of humor and their joy of life. Trainer Wilmer Slabaugh encapsulates the general feeling, saying "Gene and Guy are great guys. They have a great sense of humor, are lively and laughing all the time. You can't help but be happy

when they are around." Gene's daughter, Rachael Deel, adds, "I am in awe of my father's and uncles' approach to the horse industry and to life in general. They have such enthusiasm for life and for horses; they are as enthusiastic now as ever; they are just full of fun and laughter." Guy's explanation is that "You need to enjoy your work, whatever it is. If you aren't having fun, then you should do something else."

Cecil Brown grew up in Tennessee at a time when free

By Karin Weight



ABOVE: Jim, Gene, and Guy Brown take a victory lap with 2005 Pairs World Champions Denbury Regal Justice and Denbury Irish Justice.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Gene, Jim, and Guy on Peanut in the 1940s; Gene driving parents Cecil and LaVerne at Grand National 1986 (photo © Howard Schatzberg).

public schooling stopped after the eighth grade. His family couldn't afford private school, but he was able to continue his education at Pleasant Hill Academy by working on the school farm. As it happened, a teacher at that school inherited a farm in Pennsylvania and needed a farm manager. He remembered Cecil as a smart boy who worked non-stop. So, in 1936, Cecil moved to Pennsylvania where he later met and married LaVerne Jennings and the couple raised three sons.

Guy, Gene, and Jim Brown learned two important lessons from their father at an early age: work hard and get an education. Their mother was quiet with a great sense of humor, and she also stressed the importance of education. Going to college was never discussed as an option, it was expected, and all three brothers graduated from Penn State. According to Jim, "My dad was a strict disciplinarian, but he was fair; when we boys got whipped, it was always because we deserved it. My mother taught us to persevere, to never give up. When we started something, we had to stick with it until it was finished." Hard work was always emphasized, "Nobody asks who won second place," Cecil would tell his sons, "but if you can't win the blue, be grateful for the red and then just work harder next time." He always stressed that to get ahead in life, you had to work as hard or harder than everyone else. All three took their father's advice to heart.

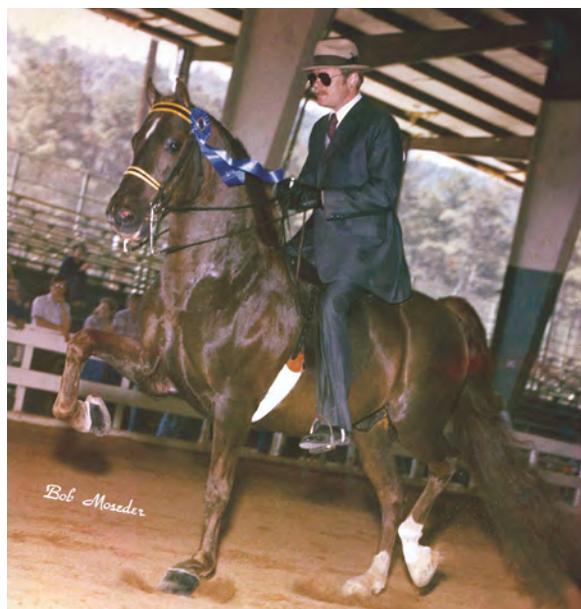
The brothers started riding, driving, and training horses as youngsters, but, Gene says, "Working with horses was never a job; it was a lifestyle." In those days, most trainers were not specialized, and the Browns were no exception. "We had a lot of latitude," Gene says, "clients would bring a horse to us and expect it to be trained to do whatever it was best suited for." They showed horses in park and pleasure, in harness and under saddle, hunt seat, Western—everything. Along with a broad variety of disciplines, they trained horses of many breeds. Guy says that they started mostly doing basic training with grades and mixed breeds, but soon found that

for a horse to sell, it needed to have a show record. Relying on Cecil's Tennessee background, they started with Walkers, but in the 1950s and '60s, the successful TWH trainers were using inhumane methods to get the "big lick" and the Brown family was unwilling to participate. Soon a few "pretty good" Morgans went through their barn and, as Guy says, "Once you have the opportunity to work with a talented horse, you never want to go back." Indeed, they did work! One year they stood twelve stallions at stud and hauled thirty-eight Morgans to the Mid-Atlantic show.

Although the brothers have always worked with multiple breeds, their emphasis, and most of their success, has been with Morgans. Cecil and the three young men started "Browns' Hoss-Pitality Services," which ran the gamut of leasing mares, syndicating breeding stallions, training, and showing. The aim was to be an all-around service to horsemen, and the emphasis gradually moved to organizing shows, auctions, and other equine events. The Browns organized and ran the very first breeding stallion auction to benefit the American Morgan Horse Association, now the major fundraiser for the AMHA's programs.

After completing their education at Penn, Gene taught school, then became a nationally-recognized school curriculum designer who, in 1973, was invited to the White House by President Ronald Reagan where he was honored as the Outstanding Educator in America. Jim used his degree in agronomy and soil science to start the extremely successful Sylvite Corp, mining potash and selling fertilizer throughout the United States and Canada. Someone once told Jim he thought fertilizer was "just shit." "Yep," Jim laughed, "and that shit is my bread and butter!" Guy specialized in agronomy, plant pathology, and toxicology; he worked for Eli Lilly and Dow Chemical for 38 years. But all three brothers always had their hands in the horse industry at the same time because none of them could get along without horses, especially Morgans.

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**TOP ROW:** Dobson was a signature show horse for the Brown family. Here he is shown driven by Cecil Brown at New England in 1974 and ridden by Gene at Dixie Cup in 1975. **BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** Medomak Vigilaire, with Gene Brown, was 1977 World Champion English Pleasure and Pleasure Driving; Gene Brown aboard Ro-Ma Vigil-Boe in 1980; Jim Brown driving the park horse Edonja Big Chief (photos © Freudy, Bob Moseder).

The family always drove through Kentucky as they traveled back and forth from their home in Pennsylvania to the family farm in Tennessee. “We liked the looks of the green grass and plentiful trees, and it was definitely horse country, so we all bought farms in Kentucky,” Jim says. “Later, I ended up in Texas; Guy never left, partly because his wife Karen [Homer-Brown] worked at the AHSA [now USEF] office in Lexington. Gene was in Texas, moved to Arizona to manage Fletcher Farms, but now he’s back living in Kentucky.”

Of the three Brown brothers, Gene had no desire to work on a farm, but he “always had a hankering” for carriage driving and he soon started training and showing singles and then multiple hitches. His 16 years as a teacher and curriculum designer, along with his equine experience, were soon noticed and he became in demand as a clinician. Fellow driving trainer and clinician Wilmer Slabaugh says, “Gene has been a premier multiple-hitch trainer. He is an excellent clinician and is always in demand. When a client has a problem, Gene focuses on coming up with a unique solution that

will work for that person and his horse.” Although Gene no longer has a training barn, he is busier than ever, continuously traveling around the country giving instruction in clinics and at private barns, and still making passes in the show ring for others.

Serious health problems have recently limited his activities but Guy has done more than his fair share of showing, both in saddle and harness. He and wife Karen Homer-Brown still have four Morgans, including a pair of driving horses, the full-brothers Bar Nothing Peter and Bar Nothing Orion (Bar Nothing Effete x Autumn Star), who are in Wilmer Slabaugh’s barn. Guy particularly enjoyed being a passenger when Gene and Wilmer used the pair as the leaders in a six-horse hitch and drove the team for twelve miles. They withdrew plans for Gene to show the pair in Oklahoma City this year, but Karen was to represent the Brown family at their 50<sup>th</sup> Morgan Grand National Show, competing in an unbroken line since 1972. She was to exhibit their fancy pleasure driving gelding Jared (ZZ Top x Paradigm Tokyo Rose). Unfortunately, Jared turned up slightly lame, and though he

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**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM:** Jim, Gene, and Guy with a six-horse hitch of all black Morgans in 2013; All three brothers participated in Ronald Reagan's inauguration parade riding titled Morgan horses; Gene's panache as a reinsman on display with KJM Hopes And Dreams in 2016 (photo © Howard Schatzberg).

appeared sound the day of his class, he was withdrawn. Typically, the welfare of the horse came first.

Jim and his wife own and manage Jim-a-Dee Ranch Equestrian and Event Center in Sanger, Texas. A large facility, it includes a 125-foot by 250-foot covered arena, pastures, trails, and a driving course. They give lessons, frequently host horsemanship clinics, seminars, and camps, lead trail rides, and are available for weddings and public events. Jim reminisces that "Gene was living just north of Dallas, and when I was taking a four-in-hand to show in OKC, he asked me to come down to work with some driving horses, especially the multiple-hitches. Gene was always tricking me, and one of his best tricks was to invite me to dinner with some friends. He sat me next to Dee Gentry, waited until I was committed to this Texan... then he left town." With his usual sense of humor, Jim adds "It turned out she was a vegetarian; I'd never have married her if I'd known that!"

Jim wasn't the only one who was "tricked" into marriage. Karen Homer-Brown is a licensed USEF judge for 15 breeds and disciplines. Although she's shown horses since she was a child, she's usually involved in show management and has managed Martin Carriage Auctions. Guy relates how he met Karen at a show, then asked for her to help him out at an auction of 53 miniature horses. The horses had come from a large pasture and had never worn halters or had much human contact, so they had been moved into a small pen. Guy needed to rope each one, explaining "I'm pretty good with a rope, but if the horse moves clockwise, I can't catch them, so I had Karen and another couple of girls keep the minis moving in a counterclockwise circle. At first there were so many that it was hard to miss, but after a while there were about six or seven left, and they were savvy mares. This was March, and it had been muddy, but 53 little horses had been in the pen for quite some time, so you can imagine what the foot-



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Karen Homer-Brown with carriage officials at New England Regional 2022. Karen is one of the busiest officials in the Morgan breed; Guy Brown driving the pleasure driving horse Jared (photos © Kim Oplotnik, Howard Schatzberg).

ing was like. Well, I threw the rope and felt it catch something, so I just pulled in...Karen. I had roped her around the neck and dragged her through the slime.” Guy adds, “I felt pretty bad, male ego, you know, so I asked her out to dinner to apologize. Then I just had to kiss her...” Apparently, roping in a prospective girlfriend can work as they have now been happily married for 37 years.

Jim and Dee have had their share of bad luck. In 2015, a tornado hit their property, removed the roofs from their house and barn, damaged every building, and destroyed more than half of his collection of antique horse carriages. “When the insurance company was settling up, they asked for the serial numbers for each carriage,” Jim laughs. “One of my antiques was a 1903 sulky that had been used in Morgan harness races, and it was tangled up in some high-tension power lines. When the power company came to bring it down, I joked that they ought to leave it up there to make it easier for people to find the ranch. They took me seriously and explained that it was shorting out other lines.

“I thought maybe God was trying to send me a message—the tornado skipped over the neighbors to the west, came down to destroy my property, then skipped over everyone to the east. That tornado took out almost all of my trees, and I’m a nature boy at heart, I love trees and green grass.” While dealing with the tornado Jim suffered a major heart attack, but he still works on the ranch, only now he’s accompanied by an eight-pound pump which keeps his heart beating.

All the brothers have been involved in the AMHA and have served on the Board of Directors. When AMHA Executive Director Fred Braden resigned, Guy willingly took over his vast responsibilities as Interim Executive Director. Guy is extraordinary at management and, like his father and brothers, has a strong work ethic and broad interests. He has managed many shows, is an FEI steward for driving, has held judging cards, and has been active in the American Driving Society, the United States Dressage Federation, and the United States Equestrian Federation. In addition, he was one of the founders and the second president of the Western Dressage Association of America. Speaking about Western Dressage, Guy has stated, “The largest equine

industry in our nation is recreational riding. What better thing can you do for you and your horse than to focus on fundamental elements of training, which is what dressage is all about.”

Gene and Jim also have volunteered innumerable hours for the betterment of the horse world. Jim was chairman of the Morgan Grand National Show Committee for two years and represented the Morgan breed for 17 years as director of the AHSA (now USEF). One of the earliest members of the American Morgan Horse Institute, and a driving force for both the annual convention and for the National Museum of the Morgan Horse, he is a life member of the AMHA, USEF, and Cowboy Dressage World. Jim spent 51 years judging eleven breeds and disciplines all over the world and is in the Arabian Judge Hall of Fame. Besides being an AMHA director, Gene has been a driving force (pun intended) in the carriage driving world and has held leadership positions in both the Carriage Association of America and the American Driving Society. Gene is equally active in Morgan promotion and has been instrumental in bringing countless people into carriage and pleasure driving. He has written articles for various horse magazines and has placed instructional videos on YouTube. The Browns attend countless AMHA meetings and events, always refusing reimbursement for their expenses.

When speaking of what type of horse they like, the brothers agree that a good attitude and willingness to work is paramount. Gene insists a horse, “must have a willingness to be educated, but the most important thing is for the handler to be listening to what the horse communicates. Regardless of a horse’s natural ability, he can’t succeed unless his rider listens and responds to that horse’s needs.” Jim wants a horse with a good mind and sound body so that they can be used. “The Arabian people started putting all their emphasis on an extreme head and halter classes,” Jim explains. “Same for the quarter horse, with big bulky bodies and tiny feet. Most breeds go through a bit of this, they ‘lead and feed’ their horses. I don’t want a horse that always has to be lead. I want one I can ride and drive.”

Asked about his favorite horses, Gene says that he may be remembered for the stallion Ro-Ma Vigil-Boe (Long Hill Vigiltor x

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### BOX SEAT STYLE

The Brown men: Gene, groom, Jim, passenger, Guy, whip, Cecil in front; Jim and Guy prepare for a victory pass; Gene drives, Guy holds on.

Foxy Pixy Jane). “He was a multi-champion park saddle horse and even better in harness. He was Reserve World Champion behind The Buckeye. But my favorite was probably Gary Horne’s stallion, San-Kay’s All A-Glow (Deerfield Challenger x Trophy’s Crystal). He just wanted to please.”

Guy touts Medomak Vigilair (Orcland Vigildon x Fancy Aire). “He was a beautiful horse to look at, but it was his attitude toward work that made him a favorite. He gave you everything that he had.” Owned by Hoosier Morgan Farm, Vigilair was both World Champion English Pleasure and Pleasure Driving in 1977. But now his love is for Jared, the gelding his wife planned to show at Grand National this year.

Jim says, “I’ve judged, ridden, and driven Morgans, many of exceptional quality. But I like the Trophy bloodlines the best. They aren’t quite as pretty-headed as some, but they are athletic with great minds.” Jim showed the Trophy-bred full-brothers Denbury Regal Justice and Denbury Irish Justice (Jaded Justice x Kresknoll Miss Val) in nine classes at the 2005 Morgan Grand National and came home with nine blues and tricolors, including world championships in Carriage Pleasure Driving Obstacles and Carriage Pleasure Driving Multi-Hitch.

The Brothers Brown are a very close family and are always in contact through texting, emailing, and are on the phone at least once a week. Guy says that most family businesses don’t last long, but they have always stayed together. “We overlook each other’s shortcomings, we have learned that diversity is our friend, not our foe. Most of all, we’ve always had good women in the background keeping us going.” Gene’s daughter, Rachael, points out that the brothers’ strong work ethic has been vital, but says, “I think what made Brown’s Hospitality Services so successful was the brothers’ close relationship; they have always been so closely involved with each other. And they have had a special combination of talents. Gene is the ultimate edu-

cator, Jim has a talent for business and finance, and Guy is a people person who is also very analytic and has a prodigious memory.”

Others point to their willingness to assist other horsemen. Successful Morgan breeder and driving enthusiast Harlan Grunden praises them. “The Brown brothers would always go out of their way to help others. Gene has given me so many pointers that have really helped me.”

All three Brown brothers are upbeat about the future of the breed. Jim points out that “Some people have worried that the Morgan has become too much like the Saddlebred, but breeds evolve, and you must keep up unless you don’t mind selling at a loss. The advent of the fancier show horses is what brought the price of Morgans up so that you can sell them for as much or more than the price of the hay and grain you put into them. You can get more mileage out of Morgans than any other breed. We need to emphasize the versatility, but make sure people understand that the versatility is in the breed, not necessarily in every individual horse. I like to see a horse that can go to a show and help the kids win stock seat equitation, carry Mom in ladies Western pleasure, then maybe do western dressage with Dad. The family goes home happy, and the horse is versatile enough for them; but don’t expect it to go out and win a park harness class the next day.” Gene stresses that the Morgan is genetically so strong that “if a breeding program starts to stray from the Morgan type, one cross of UVM blood usually will fix the problem.”

The Brown family has been in the Morgan business for many years and have seen fads come and go, but the brothers are all adamant that the Morgan’s strength, versatility, good mind, and willingness to work means that the breed will be a favorite of horsemen and horsewomen far into the future. And anyone familiar with the Brown family would tell you those same characteristics also describe the Brothers Brown. ■