

“Too busy to be crippled”

Fallen jockey returns to Colonial Downs



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

After a riding accident left her paralyzed from the waist down, former jockey and Chesterfield resident Shannon Campbell is now back at Colonial Downs. She uses a special saddle to ride and sometimes walks horses around the shed row from her wheelchair.

By Libby McNamee

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Always a daredevil, former jockey Shannon Campbell became accustomed to frequent trips to the emergency room at an early age.

Beginning with her first cast at age two, she moved on to stitches after jumping on the bed and then a concussion from falling out of a tree.

When she first got on a horse at age five, she immediately tried to gallop like the Lone Ranger. Already a horse lover, she later paid for her first riding lessons by cleaning stalls. It's no surprise that she pursued her dreams to become a talented jockey, the only female at Colonial Downs.

However, nothing could prepare her for the tragic horse racing accident in Charles Town, West Virginia, in July 2005, which left her paralyzed from the waist down.

As Campbell was racing around the track, another rider cut into her horse's front end, causing the horse to roll and throw her. The impact of the fall broke her back.

Also suffering from a bad concussion, her first memory after the accident is repeatedly asking, "Am I paralyzed?" Although she'd been told about her paralysis, the reality of her condition didn't sink in until she wanted to get up and leave the hospital and realized she couldn't walk.

Following surgery and two long months in the hospital, she was finally released and ended physical therapy, leaving it for "someone worse off."

Before long, Campbell was telling her husband Lance, "I need to learn to do for myself. You're not always going to be around."

Her independent spirit persevered despite her paralysis and ultimately led her back to

and mentor.

Not the type to just sit around, Campbell plans to organize fundraisers to help find a cure for paralysis among disabled jockeys. "Just because my legs don't work doesn't mean my heart and mind don't work," said Campbell, a Chesterfield resident. Using Donald Trump as an example, she said, "You've got to learn how to fall to be big."

"What has happened and how she has handled it has made me live my life in a different way," said Campbell's close friend Sunny Mangiafico. "I don't think she realizes that she has inspired so many people."



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

On race nights, Shannon Campbell is often at Colonial Downs, cheering on her friends.

Rather than focusing on what she has lost, Campbell says she's thankful for her husband and daughter Jenny, since many paralyzed people who are single have no choice but to live in retirement homes. She still remembers Jenny welcoming her home by saying, "You're still my momma, and I'm glad you're home."

She's also grateful for the use of her hands,

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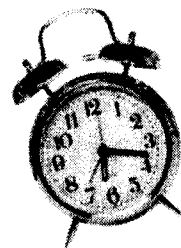
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