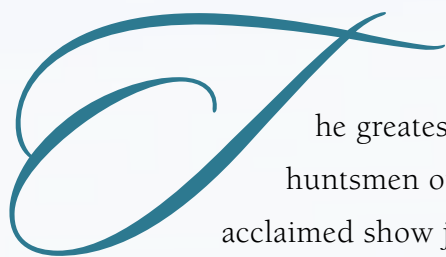




# *The* DAUGHTERS

A childhood full of foxhunting has forged brilliant people, horses, and careers for three decorated stars of the show ring.

BY EMILY DAILY



he greatest riders often begin their careers as children of huntsmen or Masters. Take Rodney Jenkins, one of the most acclaimed show jumpers of all time. His father, Enis, was the huntsman for the Rapidan Hunt at Hill Top Farm in Orange, Virginia. Jenkins' early riding education was all in the hunt field, whipping-in for his father. His first forays into the show ring were on the field hunters. He earned almost every accolade in the hunter/jumper world between the 1960s and 1980s, making him a living legend.





Caelinn Leahy competes  
at the Junior North  
American Field Hunter  
Championship in 2017.





## DOES THAT REAL-WORLD, TENACIOUS EDUCATION IN THE HUNT FIELD STILL SHAPE HUNTER/JUMPER RIDERS TODAY?

Some of today's successful young show jumpers share similar upbringings to Jenkins. Consider 18-year-old Caelinn Leahy. She's the daughter of Tony Leahy, MFH, huntsman for Fox River Valley

and current MFHA president. Based at Bellis Show Jumping Stables in Maple Park, Illinois, she discovered at an early age how hunting keeps show horses fresh in body, mind, and spirit. She says she owes much of her show jumping aptitude to hunting alongside her Irish father early in her childhood.

Likewise, it was the thrill of galloping across the rolling fields of Virginia that emboldened international grand prix show jumper Sloane Coles in and out of the ring. Her father, John Coles, is the Joint Master of Orange County Hounds in Virginia. Sloane now owns and operates Springledge LLC, a top-class hunter/jumper facility located at Springfield Farm in the heart of Virginia's hunt country.

And third-generation foxhunter, Alden Moylan, learned all about horsemanship, community, and a love of the lifestyle from her mother, Priscilla ("Penny") Denegre, Master of Middleburg Hunt, and MFHA second vice president, as well as her grandmother, Priscilla ("Pat") Rogers. Alden and her husband, Gavin, own Gavin Moylan Stables, a full-service show barn in Upperville, Virginia, where they import, train, and sell top-class show jumpers, hunters, and equitation horses. She actively competes in the Amateur-Owner jumper and hunter divisions.



## CREATING CONFIDENCE

Moylan began hunting at seven. She learned the ropes aboard an inimitable pony named Ginger, the previous mount of Jeff Blue's daughters. Blue is Jt.-MFH of Middleburg Hunt.

"My first day out, Mr. Blue invited me midway through the hunt to ride up front with him," recalls Moylan. "I will never forget my immense pride or the smiles I received from members of the field as I walked up to join him." She also remembers bringing up the rear at the famous Middleburg Hunt Christmas parade for

several years alongside her father.

Coles, who hunted often with her parents with Orange County Hunt, also enjoyed riding behind Melvin Poe's hounds in Bath County, Virginia. "Melvin was a mentor to my father, and he was like family to me," she says. "He was a legend in the hunting world and a blast to hunt behind."

She fondly remembers her mother leading or running beside her during a hunt. They're some of her earliest memories. Coles' mother put her on a small pony named Oil Can Harry (named for the white markings on his face that resembled drippings from an oil can) when she was still in diapers. "He could jump anything and keep up," Coles says. "Every day that I hunted on him, or any horse, I learned something new."

Coles says she was naturally brave on a hunt horse. It gave her an adrenaline rush, but more than anything, "it gave me the confidence to do more," she says.

In contrast to Coles' experience, when Leahy's pony bolted down hills in her early experiences in the hunt field, it shattered her confidence. But just as her stepfather



Steve Schaeffer, a hunter/jumper trainer, helped shape her riding education, he also helped her overcome her fears.

"It made me realize, especially in hunting, that you can't always be one-hundred percent in control all the time," says Leahy, a high school senior who plans to attend Vanderbilt University in the fall. "Whereas in the show jumping, if you want to, you can try to have as much control as you can. In hunting, you're going over rough terrain, and your horse has to use its brain to figure out what's going on. Once you realize you're not just riding a machine, you're riding something that can think for itself, that instills more confidence because then you start to create a partnership with your animals."

One of Leahy's grand prix show jumping partners, Splendor, enjoyed time in the hunt field, even in the midst of show season. "We had him on a two-week rotating schedule," she says. "He'd be in Georgia foxhunting for two weeks with my dad and then come down to Florida and show for two weeks, and then go back to Georgia. It was a lot of traveling for him, but it was important for our partnership and both our brains. Hunting is a peaceful environment. I think at the jumper shows, there can be a lot of pressure."



# Those Summers Were Magical

**A**lden Moylan remembers falling in love with foxhunting for the hounds, not just the horses.

Between school years at Foxcroft School, she spent five summers at the Middleburg Hunt kennels walking hounds every morning. "We were a club," she says. "The huntsman, Troy Taylor, his whippers-in, and a select few members of the hunt that he invited. We had many fun, beautifully choreographed walks, broken up by hounds expertly catching biscuits, going for swims in the pond, and wrestling with Troy's ball cap."

As the only kid, she began as "the enforcer" in the rear of the pack. She kept stragglers moving. As years passed, she earned her place and more responsibility. "I found myself in more vulnerable positions where one wrong move with that keen group of born hunters would cost me the day searching for hounds," she says. "I took my role seriously. I got to know and love each hound not only by name but also by lineage and character. Those summers were magical."

When you live and breathe the sport the way Moylan does, she says she often translates it for lay-people: "I describe the beauty of the countryside and the places you would otherwise never get to see," she says. She speaks of "the thrill of the sport, the chill that goes up your spine when the pack is in full cry, the fierce friendships formed in the field, and the chance for animal lovers to commune with the best trinity in the history of animals: fox, horse, and hound."

Just as foxhunting shaped her life, she hopes her own two young daughters will earn the fortitude, profound appreciation for tradition and history, and experience the joy of communing with nature and animals. "I believe that foxhunting can teach a young person a great deal about courtesy and respect," she adds, "getting gates and leaving them the way you found them, staying off seeded pasture, not passing the Master, letting those with colors go first, allowing plenty of room before you take a fence after someone, volunteering to go in with someone whose horse lost a shoe, and not talking when listening for hounds."

family thing," she adds. "I've learned the fundamentals from him, like doing groundwork with young horses and understanding how horses' brains work."

Coles' father designed systems in their barn specifically to facilitate efficiency in superior horsemanship. Her mother always stressed cleanliness. Both were consistent in teaching basics and safety, she remembers. "I think the biggest lesson was just learning how to read my horse's body language," she adds.

## EXTENDED FAMILIES

Growing up among adults in the foxhunting community, Leahy earned a keen sense of thoughtfulness, sportsmanship, and an appreciation for good humor, even in the face of the roughest challenges. "Being with all those foxhunters definitely fostered a sense of appreciation for the sport," she says. Leahy has always considered club members extended family. They shaped her into the rider and person she is today.

When Moylan earned her colors with Middleburg Hunt, her connection to her community made the achievement more memorable. "There was a core group of adults that were incredibly kind and nurturing to me in my formative years. I couldn't have asked for better 'aunties,' 'big brothers,' and 'goshparents.'"

Through watching her mother, a Master at Middleburg since 1994, the sport became a lifestyle for Moylan. "I have stuffed envelopes, counted tickets, designed a website, managed the mailing list, printed invitations, gone on deliveries of turkeys to farm managers, cleaned up after the point-to-point, cleared trails, walked hounds, showed hounds, searched for hounds, and enjoyed countless hunt breakfasts," she says. It's a labor of love she cherishes 🍷

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## ALWAYS GIVING THEIR BEST

For Moylan, horses were a family enterprise. Everyone contributed. She always had a horse to ride, groom, feed, or clean up after. "I was taught to take care of my horse before tending to my own needs," she says. Her parents would tell her, "Your horse just carried you over hill



and dale for four or more hours, and it is your responsibility to care for him the best you can."

Even now, the same applies to Moylan's top hunters and jumpers. "We ask the best of them," she adds, "so we should always give them our best."

It helps that Moylan always found peace and comradery in readying equipment and horses with her mother and grandmother the nights before a hunt. They bathed horses, cleaned tack, and polished metal well past sundown. "Turn-out is not just about aesthetics; it's also about function, safety, and the wellbeing of your horse," she says.

Leahy's father grew up with horsemanship in his Irish blood. It was a way of life for him. "So, it's kind of a Leahy-