

Mileposts: Kids to the Cup can change lives of both children and parents

Now 16, Anna Pinson has an interest in racing that goes beyond the desire simply to be around horses or work a staff job at the track

Since 1999, the national not-for-profit organization Kids to the Cup has been fostering young people's interest in Thoroughbred racing. Often to the surprise of parents, children are drawn in by the spectacle of horses that compete, the jockeys who ride them, and the rich tradition that surrounds the sport. Kids to the Cup, founded by successful owner and breeder Trudy McCaffery, offers opportunities for children ages eight to 16 to get involved with racing.

A compelling example of the group's impact on parent and child can be seen through the experiences of Sherry Pinson and her daughter, Anna. Anna became interested in racing at age 12 after she read *Black Gold*, a book about the famous racehorse of the 1920s. While her mother had always loved horses, racing was not really her thing.

"I had never been to the races at all until Anna asked me to take her," Pinson recalled. "At the time, we lived [in Fairfield, Ohio], about 40 minutes from River Downs and Turfway Park, but had never gone." Before she knew it, the Pinsons were spending a lot of time at the track.

Anna learned about Kids to the Cup while chatting with friends online about racing. She visited the organization's Web site on the last day of its 2002 Triple Crown essay contest, quickly wrote and entered her essay, and won two tickets to attend that year's Belmont Stakes (G1).

Soon after, Sherry Pinson realized that all the time she and her daughter spent at the track could eventually lead to a new career. With a background in free-lance copywriting and marketing, she approached Jennifer Haas, Turfway's media relations manager at the time, and asked if Haas had any job openings. There were no immediate openings, but Haas told her she would keep her in mind. While free-lancing for the racetrack's media department, Pinson received a break.

"The Tuesday prior to the 2003 Kentucky Derby (G1), [Haas] asked me, 'Why don't you come down to Churchill Downs with me,'" Pinson said. "I got the cool mom award for that one, taking my daughter out of school to go to the races."

On that trip, Haas informed Pinson of her plans to leave Turfway. She suggested that Pinson apply for the soon-to-be vacant opening. In response, Pinson first laughed then decided to take a shot at the job despite her doubts. Pinson credits Kids to the Cup Executive Director John DeSantis with encouraging her to pursue the opportunity.

"I was on my way to take Anna to Colonial Downs for her Kids to the Cup internship when I got the news that they wanted to hire me," Pinson said. "I almost ran off the road!"

Now 16, Anna has an interest in racing that goes beyond the desire simply to be around horses or work a staff job at the track. She wants to be where the action is, and Pinson supports her daughter.

"She wants to be a jockey, and she is going to do that no matter what I do, so I decided to come down to Turfway to help her do that," Pinson said. "I can either help Anna do this, or I can lose her."--*Sean Caffey* (Published in the July 2004 edition of *Thoroughbred Times*).