

# Elaine Kramer's Secret Revealed



Elaine kept her secret for 30 years. The memory of what she'd done was fading away. She had blended into the wood-work in her home community. Once in awhile someone would ask her about it but that was becoming very rare. Her nieces and nephews, and even the young man she helped raise didn't know what she had done. She was safely cloistered in obscurity.

Until June, 2003 that is, when her secret story was uncovered by a group of horse people at the Natural Gait in Marquette, Iowa. This is what they found...

Elaine Kramer of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin was a Roman rider. Not just any Roman rider either; she rode six at one time! Six matched sorrel Saddlebreds full of beauty, class and speed. Imagine driving a team of six horses – three pairs in tandem – but with NO coach or carriage. Elaine stood on the backs of her horses – Roman style. They thrilled audiences throughout the United States and Canada for twenty years from 1954 to 1974. She was a top exhibition act appearing at every major horse show and rodeo in North America.

If you ever saw Elaine Kramer's performance, you remember the thrill! Elaine and her six matched sorrels entered the arena at a dead run. They performed circles and figure eights. As they came to the center of the arena they stopped and politely stood while Elaine waved to the crowd. Then off they go again, around the end of the arena and over a 3 1/2 foot jump! Another circuit around the arena brings them to a double jump: with two teams up in the air at the same time! It looks like a carousel. They exit the arena at top speed, just like our professional barrel racers do at today's rodeos.

From her home base in Prairie du Chien, Elaine's career took her to the biggest and best rodeos, horse shows and fairs. From her first appearance at the American Royal Horseshow in Kansas City, to Toronto's Royal Winter Fair, San Francisco's Cow Palace and Madison Square Garden, to name but a few. There were rodeos in Denver and Dallas, Las Vegas and Fort

Worth. Never forgetting her Midwest roots, throughout her long career she appeared numerous times across Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin.

After 20 years performing, Elaine retired her horses. She closed out her performing career in 1974 with a cameo appearance in the Oscar-winning movie about rodeo champion Larry Mahan called "The Great American Cowboy".

Then, she started to gradually slip into obscurity. She turned her attention to building her business back home and helping with her parent's beef operation. Her humble and modest demeanor hid her tremendous skills and accomplishments.

But, in June 2003 a group attending a cattle working event at The Natural Gait in Marquette, Iowa rediscovered Elaine. She reluctantly showed them some film clips of her performance and

shared stories of her horses and career. Once again she was thrilling and amazing an audience.

That night the group decided that Elaine needed to be in the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame. The Fort Worth, Texas, organization's mission is "to honor and document the lives of women who have distinguished themselves while exemplifying the spirit of the American West."

The group also encouraged Elaine to renew her effort to produce a video about her career. "Dreams to Reality" was released in early 2004. Many of you have since seen her video and written letters to support her induction. Elaine is overwhelmed by your support. So was the Cowgirl Hall of Fame!



On June 15th of this year, Elaine got a breathtaking phone call. By unanimous vote, 3 committees selected Elaine to join the elite group of women recognized for their great performances. In October, Elaine will be inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame! She'll take her rightful place among other cowgirl legends such as Annie Oakley, Dale Evens, and Tad Lucas. And, her story will be preserved forever in the National Cowgirl Museum. Her secret is out and we are so glad it is!

"Dreams to Reality," although in limited supply, can be ordered as a VHS or DVD, for \$12.00 plus S&H. Write to Carolyn Peckham at W1662 King Road, Brooklyn, WI 53521, or email her at CLPeckham@aol.com

