On September 3, 2017, Anne Marguerite Moe (née Larson) passed away peacefully in the company of family after being diagnosed with ALS nearly a year earlier.

Born September 25, 1938 to Harry and Esther Larson of Scarville, Iowa, Anne’s love affair with horses began while riding the draft horses back to the stable after a hard day’s work on the family farm. Her career training horses began when she taught her blind pony to jump; her gift of shining in the spotlight began when she rode the blind pony up the steps of her one-room schoolhouse (purportedly on a dare).

Adventuresome, the first chapter of Anne’s life, included summers working at Glacier National Park in Montana and traveling to Switzerland as an exchange student. This chapter also included music, with Anne playing the organ and oboe and even the snare drum in her high school marching band, ultimately becoming an accomplished pianist. Her love of language led her to a degree in English from St. Olaf College in Minnesota.

In 1960, Anne married Paul Moe, and they had their first child, Tony, in Ithaca, New York while Paul completed his Ph.D. at Cornell University. In 1964, Anne and Paul moved to Maryland, where sons Bennett and Peter were born. While raising a family of three small boys, she continued her lifelong love affair with horses.

She was an early member of the Central Maryland Saddle Club, and in 1972, founded the Centaurs 4-H Club, hosting horse shows at her Lisbon farm to foster the development of the next generation of riders. The Centaurs later established an "Award of Excellence" in her honor.

Anne and boys moved to Sykesville in the late 1970’s and Anne continued a varied career in language, working with Frank Gumpert Printing and other printing and advertising companies before starting her own typesetting business.

Meanwhile, Anne continued to ride, joining the Howard County Hunt Club in 1974, putting her horse show management skills to good use for the club.

After seeing her sons off to college, Anne purchased wooded land adjoining Patapsco State
Park and built a small farm designed to suit to her life as a single horsewoman, where she could live comfortably for the rest of her life. The cleverly designed home and idyllic setting was featured in the Baltimore Sun's "Dream Home" feature column a few years later and became the site of many rides, soirees and family gatherings, a place where laughter and music from family jam sessions and sing alongs echoed through the trees.

In the late 1980's, Anne married fellow hunt club member Bob Benhoff and together they enjoyed adventures touring the country, traveling from coast to coast and into Canada.

Anne later returned to her single ways, continuing to foxchase and turning her focus to her favorite breed, the Connemara Pony. She brought promising yearlings through her "kindergarten" to produce future champion show ponies and able hunters, including Ridgetop Windy City and her beloved Oakfield Colin Finch. Anne served the American Connemara Pony Society tirelessly as Membership Chair, newsletter editor and Region III Show Secretary. In 2015, Anne became the first non-breeder to be awarded the prestigious Crestwood Award for service to the Society.

Anne was eminently pragmatic -- in how she raised her sons, in how she designed her farm so that she could manage the horses and farm by herself, in the design of her house by restricting it to simple comforts (who needs air conditioning?) and how she worked through adversity. After a diagnosis of breast cancer and enduring the mastectomy that followed, Anne refused to be troubled, simply kicking on and going about the business of living and doing the things she loved. The same held true for the diagnosis of ALS in 2016; she dug in, read everything she could, and carefully planned out her remaining months.

Even while her physical abilities declined, Anne continued her proofreading work for The Equiery, continued to devour books and maintained lively communications with extended friends and family via the modern marvel of email. As she had planned oh-those-many-years ago, Anne was able to stay in the home she so loved, surrounded by the family she had so lovingly cultivated.

Her love of horses and riding was only matched by the love for her family and her dear friends. She reveled in gatherings of her boys and their families at her home for birthdays and holidays, in reunions with her siblings, nieces and nephews, and in the company her longtime friends.

Anne is survived by her sister Muriel (Bernie) Teague, sons Tony (Sue), Bennett (Diane) and Peter (Melinda Adamczyk) and four grandsons, Justin and Nathan (Tony) and Arik and Caddain (Peter).
1999: Believe

I came across the notice for the Holiday Fiction Contest in the Sunday newspaper, and I thought I might as well give it a shot. My mother’s childhood memories, some of which we had persuaded her to put on paper, were an intimate picture of homesteading on the Iowa prairie; the handwritten pages had become a family treasure. I had a Christmas story in mind, and I would tell it. At the very least it would become part of the family archives. I dusted off my typewriter, and wrote:

SIMPLE GIFTS

The Sears, Roebuck & Co. Christmas catalog arrived on the second day of pheasant season, dropped just inside the kitchen door by Anne’s father along with a brace of limp, still-warm birds in a jumble of iridescence. The war was over. The 1940 Ford finally had new tires and a plentiful supply of gasoline. Meat rationing hadn’t affected farm families, who raised the pigs and cows. But they patriotically did their part, and game was a frequent offering on the Larson table. Pheasant was considered ordinary. It was the catalog that was exotic!

It was a wish book of many magnitudes, crammed with heart’s desires beyond anything previously imagined. Anne sat under the kitchen table, brown cotton-stocking legs and hand-me-down shoes cracking at the toes stuck out in front of her, with the catalog in her lap. The corners of the oilcloth table cover bracketed a private world in which the crowded pages proffered such riches that she felt if she let her breath go she would fly around the room in circles.

There, on the page past the Radio Flyer wagons, were the dolls—a congregation of swaddled infants, dimpled toddlers, costumed ladies—and there, in the bottom corner of the second page, was the most wonderful doll Anne had ever seen. The sweet, pink baby’s face atop the softly stuffed body with composition arms and legs was crowned by Real Lambskin, she read, with lamb’s wool curls that could be combed. Memories of the baby-warm smell and wiggling curliness of the orphan lamb she had bottle-fed last spring mingled with the words on the page, and Anne’s world was full with the sweetness of imagination.

The Larson children had no say in what might appear under the Christmas tree, and for them Santa Claus was just a pleasant tradition in the same mythical realm as the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Yet Anne believed that the miracles she had learned about in Sunday School really could happen, and each night as she lay in bed listening to the tickety-whirr of the treadle as her mother sewed the Christmas pajamas, she ended her “Now I lay me down to sleep” with a hopeful “I would really like the lamb-haired doll, please.” And during the day she would leave the catalog open to the doll page, just in case.

A week before Christmas, just as the long strings of cranberries and popcorn were being draped on the tree cut from the pine grove, plump and jolly Aunt Daisy came to visit, stomping the snow from her boots as she laughed and wiped her steamy glasses. The children crowded to help with her knitting bag, her coat, and the usual largesse that accompanied her, torn between getting her seated and taking turns in the ample lap, or discovering what wonders she had brought. Shoeboxes of Norwegian cookies—sandbakkels, rosettes, krumkake, fatigmann, berliner kranser—emerged from shopping bags to the little ones’ noisy delight; pickled herring and raw oysters produced...
wrinkled noses. And seven small packages carefully wrapped in paper saved from last year, one for each child, were placed under the tree by Aunt Daisy herself with warnings not to touch until Christmas. There was much casual strolling by the tree with straight face and eyes rolled to the corners, and much hilarity in the kitchen as there always was when Aunt Daisy came to visit.

Then it could be postponed no longer, and she held her breath as the curly ribbon came off, the paper came off, the lid came off. The quick sharp knife of disappointment slashed and retreated. Everyone was watching. She lifted a plush bear out of the box, a brown bear with yellow legs and ear linings. It looked up at her with shiny brown eyes and a sweet smile. It was beautiful.

The tree looked a little sad, Anne thought as the evening came to an end, with all its bounty gone. She added a clean stocking to the lineup under the tree and knew that in the morning it would hold a tangerine, a walnut, some hard candies.

In her new pajamas, she snuggled under the wool comforter in the cold bedroom, the unexpected soap horse in a place of honor on the windowsill, the bear redolent with newness against her cheek. Christmas Eve was over; her dreamer’s secret was still safe within her, unrevealed and unspoiled.

They took turns, one gift at a time, with everyone watching; it lasted longer that way. Anne was itching with anticipation as her turn came. She chose the pajama package—pink! And just the kind of flannel she liked, fuzzy on both sides. Now she had to wait the full circle again. She opened Aunt Daisy’s gift, resisting the magnetism of the doll-sized box. Rainbow mittens! They were soft and furry inside from yarn tails where the many colors of scraps were tied together, and they fit perfectly. As her next turn neared, her brother James (the one who always teased her) handed her a small package. She looked at him in surprise as she peeled away the wrinkled paper to reveal a horse, crudely carved from a bar of Ivory soap. She whispered a “thank you,” and he smiled shyly back.

The next morning there were seven more wrapped and tagged packages under the tree—the Christmas pajamas, for sure. And two days later there were more, including a box with the tag barely showing: To Anne From Mother and Dad.

It was just the right size box, and the thrilling hopeful dream Anne had been nurturing threatened to bubble right up out of her. She wanted to giggle, and skip, but people were watching so she quietly found the well-worn catalog and crept under the kitchen table.

At last Christmas Eve arrived, sweatered in a fluff of new snow. The children barely sipped the hot milk from the oyster stew and fidgeted in the kitchen while the dishes were washed and dried and put away. At last it was time to gather around the tree. The children recited their “pieces,” memorized for the school and church Christmas programs. Dad read the Christmas story, King James Version. Mother led the singing of “Silent Night.” At last it was time to open presents.

My little tale didn’t win the contest, but it got an Honorable Mention, and my children enjoyed it so at Christmas I gave each of them a copy to file away.

A decade later I received an e-mail from my youngest son, Peter, now a parent himself. “... and I saved your remembrance of your sister Venita and have stashed it with a copy of your
Simple Gifts story (Hey, maybe we should tell that one at Christmas time, along with the Christmas story and singing Silent Night)…”

“Funny you should mention Simple Gifts”, I e-mailed back. “I just got a Christmas card from my cousin Byrdie and she’s in terrible shape, in a wheelchair and on oxygen. She’s Aunt Daisy’s daughter. I dug ‘SG’ out and mailed her a copy. I thought she might get a kick out of it since it mentions her mother.”

I went back to baking my fourth batch of Berliner kranser, the only kind of Norwegian cookie I make, the only kind my children insist that I make. We keep most of the traditions. I can give you the history of every ornament on the tree, including the feather angel on the top who has sung gloria for the past forty years. Some traditions have been dropped or amended. Oyster stew is a thing of the past; dinner dishes sit on the counter until I am ready to do them. Time is too short—and I remember how it used to crawl by!

Some have been added. When the first son went away to college he asked if he could invite some buddies to join our family circle at Christmas Eve who couldn’t make it to their own homes, and it became one of our best new traditions. Girlfriends came and went; eventually one turned up for each son who qualified as “stocking material” and had a large stocking knitted with her name on it. Grandchildren appeared and for the past ten years we have celebrated the birthday of our own Christmas baby, Justin, before we start the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

Gifts aren’t as simple as they used to be. I was overwhelmed by the array as I wandered, bewildered, down the aisles of toys, looking for just what the grandboys wanted. Was it Star Wars Episode I Pod Racers? Star Racers? A small Buzz Lightyear with batteries? A large one with wings?

My grown boys asked what I wanted for Christmas. I live simply. I have all I need or want—how different from when we were young and wanted so many things, and wanted them so much! — so I suggested consumables, things that I wouldn’t buy for myself, useful luxuries.

On Christmas Eve we were all together, everyone home, everyone healthy. Peter and Megan were expecting their second child, my last chance for the granddaughter I always wanted. This year, for the first time, eight-year-old Nathan read the Christmas story (King James Version). Next came “Silent Night;” musicians played and singers sang. Justin read the tags and three-year-old Arik assisted in the distribution. And one by one, taking turns around the circle, we began to open our gifts. Several rounds had gone by and I was getting just what I wanted: gourmet cheeses, a box of clementines, anchovies and smoked oysters, fancy soap. Then a small wrinkled package appeared in my lap. As I opened it I saw a horse, crudely carved—yes, I could smell it—from a bar of Ivory soap. I laughed and laughed, or was I crying? Just a crude little horse. Precious. And as unexpected and touching as the original so many years ago.

“This goes with it,” said Peter, reaching under the couch and producing a doll-size box.

“It isn’t!” I choked out, laughing, or crying, or both. A holographic flashback of the old longing and disappointment flickered, and vanished. Time was suspended. The family, the tree, the lights became surreal, gauzy.

All conversation had stopped. Buzz Lightyear ceased flying over the coffee table, and the Pod Racers ceased beeping. What was happening to Grandma? Everyone was watching.

I lifted her out of the box, a vintage doll with curly lamb hair. She looked up at me with sparkling blue eyes and a sweet smile. And in the box was a note:

Christmas 1999

Dear Annie—

Merry Christmas and a simple gift to one of Santa’s favorite little girls. I know it’s taken quite a long time; I hope you hadn’t given up on Old Santa.

Please take good care of this package until another special little girl comes along. Have a merry, merry Christmas (and keep believing).

Santa
A Connemara Love Story

It was in the often-in hospitable and unforgiving terrain of Ireland’s western coast that Connemara ponies, the only breed unique to the island, developed their hardiness, agility and an extraordinary jumping ability.

Anne met her first Connemara years ago when two girls rode into her yard atop ponies owned by her neighbor, Mrs. Frey. Anne later bred her Saddlebred mare to Mrs. Frey’s imported stallion, *Lystra Lad producing two nice halfbreds. She was in love.

Over the next several years Anne purchased, trained, and sold 12 or 13 young Connemara ponies, giving them a good beginning education, and sending them on to, mostly, forever homes. Her kindergarten graduates are now all over the country, spreading Connemara good will.

In 2015, the American Connemara Pony Society (ACPS) awarded Anne the prestigious Crestwood Service Award, given annually to the person who has expended their time and energy to promote the Connemara breed and the ACPS. Past winners of the award meet secretly to decide each year’s winner. Anne said she was “totally overwhelmed,” and “humbled” to be so honored.

Anne receiving the Crestwood Award with past winners of the award, l-r; Virginia Winkler, Liz Platais, Joan Webster, Donna Duckworth, Anne Moe, Kathy Lucas, Marynell Eyles, and Susan McConnell.

Moose and the Monster

by Anne Moe

The ad jumped out at me from the classified section of The Sun: Connemara gelding, 15.3, 8 yrs. I had just returned from a year’s sabbatical and having found a good home for my old hunter before I left, was in the market for a replacement. I had become a convert to the Connemara breed back in the ’60s when I raised and sold two halfbreds by Anne Frey’s *Lystra Lad, but Anne moved out of state and I ended up with backyard horses as my foxhunting mounts with the Howard County Hounds for many years.

I called the Pennsylvania number, and the young owner told me she had owned this “pony” since he was a weanling but she had too many horses and this one kept jumping out; relations with her farming neighbors were becoming strained.
“What color is he?” I asked.
“Dark dun.”
“What do you call him?”
“Moose.”

A big neon sign saying “SOLD” flashed in my brain, and I made arrangements to look at him.

He was indeed over fifteen and a half hands and about two hundred pounds overweight, but unmistakably Connemara from his broad forehead and big, kind eye to his luxuriant flowing tail. The owner tacked him up and as I watched the Dr. Bristol bit, figure-eight noseband, and side reins go on him I began to understand the very reasonable price she had quoted me, and wondered if my not-so-young body was up to this.

She rode him first. He was tense and his gaits were crabbed but there was no belligerence in his manner. She undid the side reins at my request and put him on the longe line; he moved a little better and willingly hopped over a small log. As I got a leg up I wondered if I would have the ride of my life. We stood for a minute or two while I rubbed his neck and explained that my horses and I were friends and partners, and that I would never lie to him. We moved off at a walk, then trotted a few rounds, and at an inadvertent touch of the leg and rein he lengthened and bowed his head. He trotted over the log in perfect cadence and came to a nice square halt in the center of the ring. I made an offer and the owner, laughing rather ruefully, said, “He goes better for you than he does for me! I can tell he is going to have a happy home.”

We spent the summer walking, then trotting, up and down the hills of the Patapsco River Valley and it wasn’t long before his wind and his figure improved. In the fall he took instantly to foxhunting and soon became the horse to follow, especially over trappy fences. Many nonhunting days we would poke around the woods with my Airedale, Maggie Mae, and as spring came I showed Moose my favorite spots to see the dogwood, redbud, wild azaleas and mountain laurel in bloom. Often we would go bareback with a halter and lead shank, and I felt as carefree as a child. And Moose was having so much fun he never considered jumping out.

As the next cubhunting season approached, a wicked windstorm came down the valley, and judging from the fallen limbs on my own property I knew the local hunt trails must be an obstacle course. Moose, Maggie Mae and I went on a reconnaissance mission. Dismount, drag a branch, remount; I never had to tie Moose, as he would wait patiently for as long as it took to clear the trail. We were doing a pretty fair job with only hands for tools but finally, on the trail bypassing the railroad tunnel, we came upon an enormous fallen tree, one that would yield only to a large chain saw. On one side was a greasy clay bank falling away steeply to the swollen river, on the other was the cliff through which the tunnel passed. The dog could crawl under the tree, but there didn’t seem to be any way for us to go but over. It looked pretty daunting to me but Moose pricked his ears, bobbed his nose once or twice and rattled his bit softly—his way of saying, “I can do it!” So I grabbed mane and he did the rest, landing gracefully on the other side and coming right back to a sedate walk.

Around a curve we came to another deadfall made up of smaller trees and limbs, and impassable. But this one looked like it might yield to some elbow grease with manpower and horsepower combined. So back we went, over the huge tree...
and up the hill to home, where we switched to western tack and picked up a coil of strong nylon rope and a bow saw. I hadn’t thought of the problem of jumping in a western saddle until I saw the fallen tree again. But Moose had hopped over many coops by himself in our bramble-clearing forays, so I dismounted and crawled under the tree with the saw, then called Moose. Sure enough, over he came and on we went.

Moose had never been trained to drive but I knew his unflappable attitude well enough by this time to think I would have no trouble snagging a heavy branch, dallying it to the saddle horn and dragging it out of the way. I led Moose forward and he hesitated just a moment when he felt the pull on his saddle, but at my encouragement dug his feet in and moved ahead. Catching the moving branch out of the corner of his eye, he stopped, turned his head to look at it, then looked at me.

“This thing is following me, you know,” his ears semaphored.
“Yes, I know. It’s okay.”
“Okay.”

And on we worked, pulling and sawing, until we had reduced the deadfall to manageable proportions. I had just led Moose through the remaining debris when we both caught sight of a strange beast lumbering clumsily down the trail towards us. My first impression was that it looked like a small brown bear; Moose didn’t wait for confirmation, he whirled and ran.

It was Maggie Mae, half carrying, half dragging the fattest groundhog I had ever seen! We weren’t that far from home and if I had lost my ride it was of no real consequence, so I took the time to admire Maggie’s trophy while she shook it, dropped it, panted and shook it again. When I turned to look around for Moose, he was not more than a couple of dozen yards away, peeking around a big sycamore tree. And when he saw that the monster was nothing more than a dog, his dog, he came to meet me.

“Poor Moosie,” I crooned, as I walked towards him. “Did you have the fright of your life?”

He bowed his head and put his face against my chest, apologetically, as if to say, “There are a few things that are just too much even for my brave Connemara heart!”

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Anne as Miss Forest City at the North Iowa Band Festival, circa 1956

Anne loved making music, jamming on bass guitar with grandson Caddain, 2013

Anne traveled to Africa with son Bennett and daughter-in-law Diane and her family, stopping here in a Fulani village, 1995

Anne with Mother Esther, young Tony and infant Bennett, 1966

Anne had impeccable taste... but for some unknown reason preferred Stroh's Light, here at her 70th birthday party, 2008

At the Lisbon Christmas Horse Parade, selling her hand-knitted treasures, 2015
Anne, Peter, Tony, Paul and Bennett, early 1970's

After the Howard County Summer Musical, with Nieces Meg and Anne, grandson Justin, Tony, grandson Nathan, and daughter-in-law Sue, 2016

Peter, Tony, Anne and Bennett after Tony's Graduation, 1981

Anne always had fun playing piano for the annual Christmas singalong at the home of longtime friends, the Pardoes

Relaxing at Anne's Place with the Ladies of the Central Maryland Saddle Club

Her smile will always be remembered
The Hoofs Of The Horses

The hoofs of the horses! — Oh! witching and sweet
Is the music earth steals from the iron-shod feet;
No whisper of lover, no trilling of bird
Can stir me as hoofs of the horses have stirred.

They spurn disappointment and trample despair,
And drown with their drum-beats the challenge of care;
With scarlet and silk for their banners above,
They are swifter than Fortune and sweeter than Love.

On the wings of the morning they gather and fly,
In the hush of the night-time I hear them go by —
The horses of memory thundering through
With flashing white fetlocks all wet with the dew.

When you lay me to slumber no spot you can choose
But will ring to the rhythm of galloping shoes,
And under the daisies no grave be so deep
But the hoofs of the horses shall sound in my sleep.

William Henry Olgivie (1869-1963)

Rest in peace, Anne.
You are so very loved.