

## Sally Speaks: A Special Love

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In this month of February following the holiday when people's attention has been focused upon the subject of "love" I would like to tell you about a special "love of mine" – my horse named Douchka. In my second book, I am pictured riding Douchka in a large picture at the very front of the book.

In my early twenties, I had been teaching at the Dedham country and Polo Club. Dedham was a suburb of Boston. There was a gal I had been teaching there who owned Douchka (which is a Russian name for "Dearest") and would take her lessons upon him. At some point, she got sick and had to go to Arizona, and she couldn't take him with her so she gave him to me. What a fabulous gift this was for me!

Douchka was only the second horse I had ever owned. I loved him dearly. When I got unhappy, I used to go out and cry on his neck (I forget what I was unhappy about, but I remember crying upon his neck in the barn). He was a beautiful horse – a 7/8 thoroughbred – just a lovely horse. I was so lucky to have him.

After I left Dedham where he had been given to me, my next job was at the Fox Hollow School in Lenox, Massachusetts. While working at the Fox Hollow School, I was living at a friend's house. One night, someone called me and told me that the barn at the school was on fire. I tore up to the school to find that someone had let all of the horses out into an open field above the schoolhouse. I stayed to make sure all was well – the fire was out and things had calmed down.

At daylight, I returned to the school and up to the field to see my horse Douchka standing still. It was very unusual that he did not come to me. I went up to him only to discover that he was standing on three legs, holding out his left front leg. It seems that in all the commotion of the horses being let out of the barn and the excitement of the fire, he had been kicked by another horse, and his leg was badly broken.

I yelled for someone to call the vet and to get me a rug. My original intense work with horses was with an English woman – Phyllis Linnington. She used to talk about blankets as rugs. I was so upset upon finding Douchka that I asked for a rug instead of a blanket! They did just that and I had to cover my dear Douchka with a rug. Anyway, it worked to keep him warm.

The vet came and confirmed that Douchka was badly hurt with a broken leg and needed to be put down. He suggested that I leave, thinking that I would not want to watch nor hear the sound of his gun. However, this was my horse that I dearly loved, and there was no way I was going to leave my Douchka. He knew me and was in pain, and I was not going to leave him as long as he was alive. I turned my head as, unbearably, my partner's life was extinguished.

I did not cry at that moment; my sobbing came later when I realized the truly remarkable partner and friend I had lost.



*Photo: Sally Swift in 1930 with Douchka at a horse show in Medfield, Massachusetts*