

Jay Sargent's Love for Animals Stretches From Land to Sea

To say this USHJA member and former USHJA Zone 1 Committee member loves animals would be an understatement.

As a child, Jay Sargent trained her dog and a donkey named Pedro, and then fell in love with horses. Her passion for animals led her to become a professional Hunter/Jumper trainer, and her “stable” of companions now includes those who gallop through fields and swim in the oceans.

Sargent, of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, may well be one of the only equestrian professionals who splits her time between training horses and swimming with dolphins.

“I’ve always been a complete animal nut,” Sargent said. “My neighbors had a pinto and a Shetland pony. I would walk out in the woods and just hope I’d see them, and maybe they’d let me get on. That was the beginning, and then I did once a week lessons,” she recalled.

Her interest in the sport grew, and she finally convinced her parents to buy her a horse. As she moved up through the levels, Sargent realized she could pursue a career in the sport.

“My parents were great; they figured if I followed my dreams, that was the way to go. I dropped out of college and went into business when I was quite young,” she said.

Sargent owns Sandy Point Stables in Rhode Island, where she has built an operation that handles everything from training and sales to competition management.

“I have a 32-stall barn; I bought the barn and restored it,” Sargent said. “They say ‘Don’t put all your eggs in one basket,’ and

I’ve always sort of done everything. I have camp, an Intercollegiate Equestrian Association team, an Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association team—I ran 14 horse shows for a long time. Now I’m down to 10 horse shows. I enjoy putting the horse shows on.”

Sargent said she also enjoys finding and developing horses.

“I have an agent in Canada, and I’ve bought more than 60 horses from him,” she said. “I bring them down, and it’s so much fun. I lease them or sell them. I have a handful of them all over the place at different barns.

“Animals have always been my life, and I think the reason I’ve been successful is my understanding of animal behavior,” she continued. “I never had any interest in the

sea, even though my brother is an oceanographer and we spent summers on Cape Cod. When I met JoJo, all of that changed.”

JoJo is a dolphin Sargent befriended while vacationing in the

Turks and Caicos Islands. “One day, I was out on the beach, and I had heard about the dolphins, and I see a dolphin swimming around the buoy,” she said. “I saw him, swam out there, and told him he was handsome, and he let me follow him. After that point, I was obsessed.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAY SARGENT

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Jay Sargent

Sargent, who said she was never brave about being in the water, learned how to snorkel and free dive so she could swim with JoJo. Eventually, she and her husband, John, purchased a boat, which they named “Catch Ride.” As she began to swim more often with JoJo, she discovered he swam with other dolphins, and they eventually let Sargent tag along with them, as well.

Sargent was inspired to document her adventures with the dolphins and has written numerous blog posts on her website, also posting videos of her swims with the dolphins. In addition, she’s written the books “JoJo and Me” and “JoJo and Me II,” as well as a children’s book called “JoJo Saves His Friends.”

Through her interactions with the incredible animals, Sargent has become an advocate for protecting dolphins in the wild.

“I think it’s their behavior that interests me more than anything else,” Sargent noted about the dolphins. “The same thing with horses and putting them with a rider. From dealing with a variety of animals, I don’t feel they’re all that different. I’ve always had

FROM JOJO AND JAY'S BLOG

Tuesday, February 4, 2020

Hi All,

John and I made it down here after a year of medical issues. We only get three weeks before I have to return to the hospital, so I plan to make the most of it! We head out and start traveling up and down the coast looking for dorsal fins. I know it's my first day out, but we only have three weeks and I'm dying to see JoJo. Last season, he seemed distracted by a remora (suckerfish) that wouldn't leave him alone. I'm hoping the remora will be gone and that he'll be more interested in swimming with me.

We've been out all day with no luck. It's been windy and cloudy, but we carry on. As we approach Leeward, I suggest one more trip to Pine Cay. I have a feeling that JoJo might be there toward the end of the day. I put on my wetsuit just in case. The water is murky, and it's hard to see anything. Suddenly, JoJo pops up at the bow and glides under the boat. I hurry into my snorkel gear and climb in. He comes right up.

Due to all the wind, the water is incredibly murky. If he's more than an arm's length away I can't see him. He took a close look to be sure it was me! I noticed he had a fresh cut on his left side. He followed me for a while then swam ahead, indicating he wanted a faster ride. I swam to the boat, and we (followed) him to Grace Bay. I'm a very happy and lucky person to come to Turks and in our first afternoon find this wonderful dolphin that I've known for over 20 years.

For more information about Jay, JoJo and the dolphins, please visit www.jojoandjay.com.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAY SARGENT



Jay Sargent splits her time between training horses and riders in Rhode Island and swimming with dolphins in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

to make friends with them. It was the same thing with the dolphins.”

From Sargent's blog, titled “JoJo and Jay” (*see sidebar*), she's documented her encounters with the dolphins over the years as their meetings have continued.

“He would bring me on these magical swims,” Sargent said of JoJo. “He started to introduce me to other dolphins. I've swum with their babies. They're all different, but they're all so fun.”

Sargent estimated that JoJo was born in the late 1960s or early '70s, so he's quite a fixture in the area. “JoJo is an ambassador Bottlenose dolphin that lives around the Turks and Caicos Islands,” she described. “He's probably around 40 years old and has swum with many people over the years. I first met JoJo in 1999. Tim Ainsley, the captain and owner of (the boat) ‘Beluga,’ told me about him, and then I got to see them interact. It wasn't until I interacted with JoJo myself that my real fascination started.”

Now, Sargent thinks nothing of spending the whole day on the water in the Turks and Caicos Islands during her breaks from running her Sandy Point Stables.

Sargent travels to her condo on Providenciales and visits JoJo and his friends as often as she can. On one visit last year Sargent wasn't feeling well, and not long after found out she had cancer. Because of her condition and COVID-19, Sargent hasn't been back to visit JoJo since February, the longest she's been away from the dolphins in many years.

Sargent isn't sure why JoJo and the other dolphins have formed such a special bond with her, but she thinks a lot of it has to do with how she treats animals.

“I have a theory that some people have a little bit of an ‘aura,’ and I think I have it,” Sargent said. “I'm very laid back, and when I go out there it's all at his terms. I've found if you treat them with respect and it's their world, they will take you with them. It's such an incredible honor.” 