MY CRISPR STORY

Now on Course, CRISPR J

Wendy Newsham

I named my new horse CRISPR J.

There. I said it. It's either the smartest or dumbest thing I've ever done, but he's officially registered with the United States Eventing Association (USEA), my sport's governing body, so the deed is done and there's no turning back. I definitely have reasons, none of which involve actual genetic editing of any sort. That said, I would have sold a major organ if I could have had my previous horse cloned, but that's a story for a different day.

By way of introduction, I am the Director of Global Sales and Business Development for Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., the company that publishes *The CRISPR Journal*. I manage the sales operation for our peer-reviewed journals business all around the world, but I am based in my office in New Hampshire in the United States.

I grew up as a horse-crazy kid in a family of horse people going back many generations. I was fortunate to get my first pony when I was just three years old, and I have had horses ever since. I mostly compete in a sport

called eventing, which combines three phases—dressage, cross-country jumping, and stadium jumping—in one competition, often held over the course of three days but sometimes crammed into one, to result in a final, combined score.

My favorite movie as a child was a 1966 Disney film called *The Horse in the Grey Flannel Suit*, which featured a widowed father who wanted to make his daughter happy by buying her a horse of her own while simultaneously winning a big advertising account for his company. He buys the horse and names it after the pain-reliever account he'd been wooing—Aspercel. The horse goes on to win worldwide acclaim, the dad falls in love with the horse's trainer, and everyone is happy. (As an added bonus, it features an 18 year-old Kurt Russell!)

In 2017, when my colleagues at Mary Ann Liebert were working hard to launch *The CRISPR Journal*, and it seemed that every other word in the office was “CRISPR,” I was in the process of shopping for a

FIG. 1. CRISPR J. (Credit: Connor Trieby.)

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new horse and continually threatening to name him CRISPR. Then, in late September 2018, when this big, dark-bay thoroughbred came into my life (Fig. 1), I made good on my promise. But as odd luck would have it, when I tried to register him with the USEA as “CRISPR,” that name was already taken. Undeterred, I added the letter “J,” which was actually more suiting anyway.

But there’s a bit more to this story. As we were working to launch the journal, I became fascinated with CRISPR (the science), and even though I’m merely an English major with no science in my personal background whatsoever, I was devouring every bit of mainstream-level information I could find. I even read *A Crack in Creation* by Jennifer Doudna and Samuel Sternberg. I loved the science and the way it had applications across so many life-improving areas such as food, agriculture, animal, and human applications. CRISPR can make crops more disease and drought resilient, foods that spoil more slowly, livestock that are resistant to diseases, and, of course, potentially eradicate genetic disorders in humans.

The first recorded birth of a cloned horse took place on May 28, 2002, in Cremona, Italy, when a Haflinger mare gave birth to her genetic twin, Prometea.¹ In recent years, cloning of sport horses has become quite popular. A breeding operation in Argentina, Crestview Genetics, has bred more than 200 cloned polo ponies since 2009,² and the

practice is gaining popularity in eventing as well. However, the governing body of Thoroughbred horse racing, The Jockey Club, will not register cloned horses, so we won’t be seeing a genetic offspring of Man o’ War galloping down the home stretch of the Kentucky Derby anytime soon—or likely ever. And I’m fine with that.

Over the past nine months, I’ve become something of a CRISPR groupie. I talked about my newfound fascination everywhere I went. In my mind, I was now super cool. Frankly, I don’t think my friends were even slightly surprised when I named my horse CRISPR J. And if I’m being honest, I’m always seeking brownie points ... what’s better than naming your horse after a journal you publish?!

So, this summer, when CRISPR J and I are entered in our first horse trials event, if you happen to be in attendance and hear the announcer say, “Now on course, CRISPR J, owned and ridden by Wendy Newsham,” you’ll know My CRISPR Story.

References

1. Touchette N. Cloned horse foal beats the odds. *Genome News Network*, August 7, 2003. Available online at: www.genomenewsnetwork.org/articles/08_03/clone_horse.shtml (accessed May 5, 2019).
2. Cohen J. Six cloned horses help rider win prestigious polo match. *Science*, December 13, 2016. Available online at: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/12/six-cloned-horses-help-rider-win-prestigious-polo-match> (accessed May 5, 2019).