

## Female sulky driver

# Working in a man's world

*Experiences no feelings of disrespect from males in the field*

By Jessica Nyznik

Kris Hie is not your typical sulky driver. It's not because winning isn't the most important thing, which to Hie it isn't, but because Hie is somewhat of an anomaly in the horseracing world. Hie is a female driver.

"I've won races and still been dissatisfied with the way I drove, thinking I could have drove that horse better or I could have done it easier. And then there's been races where I haven't won but I felt like it was probably my proudest race because I did everything that I could in my power in order to gain position with that horse," said Hie.

Her first name is actually Kris, although she goes by Krissy. Her father, Doug Hie, who is also a driver, named her after a horse called Kris Messenger.

"She calls herself Krissy because she thinks some people think that she's a guy. I don't think she should be able to call herself Krissy because that's not her name," Doug said.

There is no mistaking Hie as anything but a girl. At 5'7" she has a slim build and a petite, yet strong frame. Her light skin is flawless and her big blue eyes shine brightly while sporting just a hint of mascara and eye shadow. Hie's shiny dark brown hair is pulled back into a loose ponytail and her off-white pearl drop earrings are her only accessory.

The interview took place in the paddock of the Kawartha Downs Racetrack in Peterborough, Ont. Hie is not racing that night, but has come to help out her father who is in three of the 10 races that evening. Although she is always at the track, racing or not.

Her duties include harnessing and prepping the horses, bathing them after a race and cooling them down. Wearing a white North Face windbreaker, black snowboarding pants and green rubber boots, she blends right in with all the other groomsmen and women.

If Hie were racing tonight, she would be dressed in her uniform, or colours as she calls them. She and her father share the same colours, which families often do – they are blue and yellow with red piping. Hie said that if she were to do her colours over again, she would choose a black base with hot pink piping to stand out with her own identity.

Pink would certainly set Hie apart from the other drivers as she is the only woman driver permanently based out of the Peterborough track. According to United States Trotting Association, only seven out of 100 drivers are women.

These numbers might mean she would



Photo by Jessica Nyznik

**Parkhill Horton watches his owner Krissy Hie clean out his neighbour's stall at her family farm, Hielite Acres, in Frasersville, Ont., last Friday.**

be treated differently, but Hie said she feels right at home amongst her fellow drivers.

"I've heard other females say that because they're female, they don't get treated with equal respect but I completely, 100 per cent, disagree with that. People are going to give you respect on the track if you have the right horse that you're driving – that's the first thing they look at, if your horse is any good."

"It's not unusual for me to go to someone's house and have a poker game with them. I'm popular with those guys, they like hanging out with me," Hie said. "They like talking to me because I understand what they're saying, as far as the racing industry goes. I can keep up with the conversation because I know the details."

After the races, Hie jumps in her car and heads to her place. She lives with her father, sister Marcy and two-month-old nephew, Elliot, in the family home that she was raised in. The lights from the racetrack are still visible from the family's 100-acre property, which is called Hielite

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*Female sulky driver Kris Hie*

Acres.

When Hie was asked what her father thought about her racing, she took a long pause and said, "How do I say this politely? He thinks it's neat. I think it makes him proud but he would never say so."

After an evening with Hie, her father's opinion and actions are clearly a bone of contention. She did not start racing until

seven years ago at the age of 25. She said she feels her father's lack of confidence in her was the major reason why.

"When we're in a race, he'll still be yelling over at me trying to tell me what to do, and it's like, steer your own horse! It's ridiculous. Even when I'm not racing against dad, when I'm going by with the horse I can hear him yelling at me and trying to tell me what to do."

Doug was asked how he feels about racing with his daughter.

"I'd just as soon not be in the same race with her," he said.

"It's like racing against my brothers, I'd prefer not to."

The other reasons Hie said she didn't start her driving career earlier and still doesn't do it full-time is the lack of security, monetarily and from a job-stability standpoint.

"If the future of racing was certain, then I would be racing. You're never certain to get a pay cheque with the race horses."

Hie graduated from Trillium College in Peterborough two years ago and has been

working as a personal support worker at a retirement home, Riverview Manor, for the past year.

"I'm a caregiver. Like with the horses it's constant care giving and with my PSW job it's kind of like constant care giving as well. It's really the same basis. You want to make sure your horses are fed properly, cleaned properly and if there are any wounds you want to make sure they're looked after."

As a third-generation driver, Hie said she is heartbroken with the government's decision to close roughly 35 racetracks across Canada. Her father will lose the only job he's ever known and her sister will also lose her job as a kitchen worker at the racetrack.

However, despite it being the end of an era for the Hie family, one thing is certain. The passion and connection that Hie has with horses is immeasurable and won't end simply just because the races do.

"Want to know my favourite smell?" Hie asked, as she puts her face closer to the horse's, "The muzzle. It's euphoric."

# Sun shines on Promise Land Family Fun Farm

*Good opportunity for young and old to experience the pleasures and farming experience*

By Lyndsay-Lee Quinn

The rain held off and the sun came out for the grand opening of Promise Land Family Fun Farm on Saturday.

Mayor of Quinte West John Williams, councillor and neighbour Ron Hamilton, along with family and friends, joined the Dowswell family and their staff at their new permanent petting zoo for the ribbon cutting ceremony on October 6.

This petting zoo is a chance for the young and the young at heart to interact with farm animals and enjoy quality time with family.

"I think it's a good opportunity for kids and young people to come out and learn about farming. Quinte West is about 60 per cent rural but a lot of kids don't get to see animals up close. It's a business but more than that it's even an opportunity to recognize what happens outside the big city," said Williams.

Originally from Brampton, Ont., the Dowswells moved to Quinte West. It was a decision that was made for the Dowswells' children.

"We wanted a better life for them, so we decided to move here," said Cheryl Dowswell.

The Dowswells have owned the farm for six years, and have been in the process



Photo by Lyndsay-Lee Quinn

**Mayor of Quinte West John Williams is the first visitor to feed the goats at Promise Land Family Fun Farm after the official ribbon-cutting ceremony. The grand opening was held last Saturday.**

of having a permanent petting zoo for the last four years.

It wasn't until early September of this year that until the Dowswells and their team were able to start setting up booths

and building fences.

"We acquired a few animals and put them in the front field, and then people started stopping. We got asked to do a petting zoo in Cobourg so we did it, and

then Belleville asked us to do stuff. So we're fully insured and we are registered with the health unit, and so we started doing portables," said Dowswell.

More and more people were stopping

at their farm, and when the Dowswells would take their portable petting zoo around, it was becoming clear there was a need for a permanent petting zoo in the area.

At Promise Land, people are able to learn about different kinds of animals, from goats and chickens to miniature horses and peacocks. There are signs posted outside each pen to give visitors information on each of the animals.

The staff at the farm are also very knowledgeable and always willing to answer questions. Visitors can purchase a handful of pellets to feed the animals.

Visitors can buy snacks and drinks while they are there. There is also a playground for kids, which they plan on expanding. The Dowswells have other expansion plans for the farm as well, including wifi access for visitors, installing a permanent maze as well as acquiring more animals. They will also be making improvements to Promise Land Farm so that it is more wheelchair-friendly.

"They've done a fantastic job here. They like what they're doing and it's well presented, easy to get at and accessible which I think is what the people want to see. Congratulations to them," said Williams.

Promise Land Family Fun Farm is a local way to spend the day. Admission is six dollars for adults and teens, five dollars for seniors, four dollars for children two to 12, and free for children under two. More information, including hours of operation, can be found at [www.plfarm.ca](http://www.plfarm.ca).