

by STEPHANIE DONOVAN

# The "Belle" of Cy-Fair

## Cy-Creek Graduate Gives Up Her Dancing Shoes for Daytime Drama



Martha Madison was on the Silverados drill team at Cy-Creek HS



Now Stars as Belle in Days of Our Lives

**Hometown girl and actress Martha Madison** has had her share of drama playing Belle Black for the past three years on NBC's long-running soap opera, *Days of Our Lives*. Only recently, Belle has survived serious post-partum depression, a fierce child custody battle, a confusing love triangle, and a battle against a typhoon on the high seas which swept away her toddler. Compared to that, you might say Martha's life growing up in the Cypress area was quite ordinary. But, actually, Madison had to take many daring leaps to get her where she is today—a few of which landed her on an entirely different path than she ever expected.

### Spending Summers on Stage

Martha Butterworth (now Madison) spent most of her pre-teen and teen years in Cypress, moving here when she was in the 4th grade. She describes Norchester, her neighborhood off of Grant Road, as the "perfect little neighborhood to grow up in." But, unlike most of her peers who spent summers at camp and the local pool, Martha says her time was spent on the Actors' Theatre of Houston stage instead. "It was actually my summer hub when I was a little girl," says Madison. "I just always wanted to be somewhere where I was in front of people... showing off," she laughs.

Martha's older sister, Bo Yates, contradicts her speaking only of Martha's dedication and humble attitude about performing during those years, "Martha was never obnoxious with her desire to be an actress. She would go to her classes and auditions and not really talk about it too much. I think she found out at an early age that bragging was not very becoming and not very well received, so she never did it."

### Dancing Her Way Through High School

As she grew older, Martha's passion for performance focused in more on her natural dancing talent, than her stage acting. While attending Cy-Creek High School, Martha says she practically lived in the Silvera-

dos drill team room, confessing she was not into books and all about the extra-curricular activities. "I was with the Silverados for three years. I was a captain my senior year. That's really what I was hoping to do with my life, was to dance."

Martha high-stepped her way on to leading the dance team at Texas A&M, and later to attending the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City. Then she hit a serious roadblock. "Unless you're with a city ballet or something, it is very difficult to get a job on Broadway unless you are a vocalist too. You have to sing first. They don't even see you dance unless you can sing. And, I can't!" Madison admits.

### Taking a Big Leap of Faith

Disappointed but not defeated, Madison returned to her love of acting and began the grueling life of an undiscovered actress—auditioning for roles in LA, while juggling late hours as a bartender in New York to pay the rent. She even took a small job with a troupe dancing at Bar Mitzvahs in New Jersey to support her dreams.

Then, one day, Madison decided that she had to take the ultimate leap and sacrifice. "I was bartending in New York and living that night life and I was kind of getting tired of it," says Madison. "I was 26, and I thought, this isn't working and I need to do something drastic. So, a friend of mine and I sold all of our stuff off and got on a plane for Los Angeles. And, I thought, this is my last ditch effort."

An effort that would pay off when nine months later Martha landed a role on her favorite soap opera, *Days of Our Lives*. Today, Martha's character, Belle, has grown to be one of the most popular on the show, earning her shared fan nominations for both a Daytime Emmy award and a Soap Opera Digest award.

Madison says another wonderful thing popped into her life about the same time as her television debut, and that was meeting her future fiancé. "He owns the restaurant where I was working before I got the job on *Days*, and he was actually one of the very first people I met when I moved to Los Angeles. Again, one more reason why that crazy move was totally worth it."

## Sharing Her Mother's Story for a Good Cause

When not focusing on her upcoming wedding bells or her character Belle, Martha plays another role for which she feels most passionate—her work with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society as a Celebrity Ambassador. Martha's mother was stricken with the disease when she was only six, and so her work to raise money for MS is very personal. "It's really great that I can do something to help and something more than just show up on screen every day—to really reach out and help people. I think that work has been probably the most fulfilling part of this job."

Most recently, Madison and several of her cast mates organized and raised more than \$16,000 at a celebrity fundraiser for MS held during the 2007 Days Fan Weekend. "Martha is very dedicated to helping the National MS Society achieve a world free of MS," says Marni Deckter, Director of Communications for the Southern California chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Deckter adds, "Martha is very open and candid in publicly sharing her moving story about how MS has touched her and impacted her mother."

When asked about her on-screen drama and whether poor Belle will ever get some peace in her life, Madison laughs, "I honestly don't know. I think once Belle perhaps finds her child, things will start to look up—but there's always that danger looming in the corner for her!"

One thing is for certain. While Madison's television persona may not find any breaks in life, chances are that things will continue to look up for this hometown girl in the years to come. **CFM**

*Stephanie Donovan is a writer and the editor of Cy-Fair Magazine. She has lived in Cypress for more than six years, and has been a fan of Days of Our Lives since high school. And, yes, she got Martha's autograph!*

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# Horsing Around Cy-Fair

## Area Horse Lovers Find a Stable Place in Cypress

There are many things that Paige Dotson loves about horse riding. "I love to trot, walk, and canter, and the wind in my hair," she says. Paige's mother, Claire, says her ten-year-old daughter has always loved horses. It started with looking at pictures of horses. "I got a book about horses, and one of my best friends was crazy about horses, so I thought I would ride," Paige says.

Today, Paige has been riding for a year and takes lessons at R&M Stables. Although she doesn't own a horse, she does have a favorite—the Rocky Mountain horse. "I love its color," says Dotson. "It's a running horse. I think it's just an awesome horse."

### Horse Riding Starts Early

Like Paige, Rose Ann Byers' love for horses began when she was a child. "I had horses growing up and always loved them." Byers, the owner of R&M Stables in Cypress, bought her stable about five years ago to have a place for her horses. Says Byers, "I owned two horses at the time and was boarding them at a place like mine and I thought, I want to live like that. I want to wake up and go down to the barn everyday."

Today Byers' place for her horses has now grown into a full-fledge equestrian business. R&M Stables offers boarding, leasing, and riding lessons. By day, Byers works as a corporate trainer, but her evenings and weekends are devoted to running her stable.

### The Love of a Horse Never Fades

The Cypress-area boasts many horse stables and training grounds for those interested in riding. And it seems to be a hobby with which interest does not fade with age. Byers says, "Many of the adults that come out to the stable had horses when they were children. It's something you never forget."

Byers offers lessons to children as young as five—however, seven-, nine-, and eleven-year olds make up the majority of those taking lessons. "Something about the look of a horse attracts them and the sense of freedom they get when they're riding." Adds Byers, "My lesson takers will come just to see the horses and feed them carrots. There is such a large horse community out here."

Callegari Stables, another stable in Cypress, also offers a variety of activities including boarding, leasing, training, lessons, and birthday parties. "About the only thing we don't do is rent horses by the hour," says Candace Callegari who owns the stable with her husband, Eduardo.

Callegari's love of horses, like Byers, led her to stable ownership. "I've always liked horses, but never owned one until after college. With my spare money, I bought a horse, but always had to board it places, says Callegari. "Like most boarders, I wanted to bring the horse home, but it was never as much fun as being at a stable." Callegari adds that the main reason she built a stable was for the social environment and to be around friends. "Stables are just a blast," she says.



Nicole shows off her bareback riding skills at Callegari Stables