

## Kappa Delta Awe-Inspiring Woman Over 50 - Debi Metcalfe



A wife and mother, living quietly in Shelby, North Carolina with her husband and children and her beloved horses, always preferring to stay in the background when helping out in the community. That was the life of **Debi Bailey Metcalfe, Epsilon Zeta-North Carolina at Pembroke**, and a Kappa Delta Awe-Inspiring Woman over 50. But it all changed on September 26, 1997, when Debi awoke to find her husband's horse Idaho was missing. "Idaho was a part of the family," Debi acknowledges. "To us, the loss was tremendous and we had to do something." Thinking at first that Idaho had simply gotten

gotten loose, Debi and her husband, Harold, searched for Idaho and called everyone they knew to see if anyone had seen Idaho.

This was the start of a journey that would take Debi and her family around the country, via car and the Internet, and would change their lives forever – for it didn't take long for Debi to realize that Idaho had been stolen. She called to report the abduction to the local sheriff's department, but unfortunately, local law enforcement did not have a lot of training on finding a stolen horse. So, Debi took it upon herself to find Idaho, anyway possible. One new possibility was the Internet.

In 1997, the World Wide Web was a new way of communicating, and Debi had no experience with it all. "I had never even used the Internet," she admits. On a quiet Sunday before church in 1997, Debi sent an e-mail to the horse people -- people around the country who Debi had met over the years, all who shared her love of horses. Before she knew what was happening, that fateful e-mail was being forwarded around the Internet, going to hundreds of people. "One woman who I had never met, designed a Web site for us," Debi explains. And that was how Stolen Horses International, a non-profit organization that helps to find stolen horses across the country, came to be.

Debi spent more than 11 months of her life searching for Idaho. Everywhere she went, she looked. "I even went undercover to investigate," Debi says. "But I don't recommend that anyone do that." Her network of helpers eventually stumbled upon the person that had stolen the horse. "He stole the horse and sold it to fund his drug addiction," Debi explains. "He sold Idaho to an auction company who in turn sold her again." Before it was all over, Idaho had been sold four times and ended up with a family in Tennessee.

1998 had not been a good year for Debi. In August 1998, Debi's mother passed away. "Before she died, my mother told me I would find Idaho," Debi recounts. "I was beginning to lose hope but no one would let me give up." It was Labor Day 1998 when Debi and Harold decided they needed to just get away. So, they jumped in a car, with nothing except fliers about Idaho, and started driving around, with no destination in mind.

They ended up in a remote part of Tennessee and stopped at a convenience store, where Debi hung the last flier they had with them. This would be the turning point. Someone at the store saw the flier and called Debi with information about Idaho. The family that had

purchased her for the last time was using Idaho as a jumper for their young daughter. After much discussion and having to involve the law to get Idaho back, the wonderful day arrived that Idaho was being given back to Debi and her family.

“We were sitting in a church parking lot, in the middle of nowhere, waiting for Idaho,” Debi tearfully recounts. “We could see the police truck coming up the dirt road toward us. Idaho was tied to the back of the truck. He was despondent, thin and not the same horse.” Would he remember Harold and Debi? It was at that moment that Harold whistled a distinctive whistle that he always used for Idaho. “I will never forget it as long as I live,” Debi says. “When Idaho heard the whistle, he started galloping, trying to get past the truck so he could get to Harold.”

It was at this moment that Debi knew the journey was just beginning for her, not ending. “People were so kind to us as we looked for Idaho and I knew that I had to help others who were in the same place that I was,” she says.

“Throughout that year, I saw the best and the worst of people,” Debi explains. Complete strangers helped as much as they could. Her Kappa Delta sisters, such as Knuckles Shackelford, joined in to help.

Since 1998, Stolen Horse International has helped countless people to find their beloved animals. People had endless questions for Debi, so in order to answer everyone’s questions, she wrote “Horse Theft – Been There, Don’t That.” Debi dedicates herself full time to helping others who are experiencing the same pain as her family. She receives hundreds of e-mails daily and travels to speaking engagements across the country, where she educates her fellow equine enthusiasts about theft prevention.

“It’s funny,” Debi says. “When Idaho was first stolen, I wouldn’t stand up even in my chapter meetings and speak to anyone. I started speaking to small groups at first and then, more and more. It’s like someone else is talking, not me.”

One wonderful thing that came out of this ordeal is that Debi reconnected with many of her KD sisters. According to Debi, “You take friends out of your Kappa Delta days and they will be there forever.” Continuing, she explains, “it was like time had stood still. It didn’t matter that we had not talked in years, the bond was still strong.”

Just recently, one of Debi’s KD sisters, Kathy Carrowon Boone, heard about a horse being stolen in her home town. She contacted Debi who contacted the victim and the horse was found, with the help of Stolen Horse Internationals. “So it is a fact that had I not been a KD, this happy ending would most likely not have happened,” Debi says. “Talk about full circle?”

And as we all know, it is a small KD world. “I have met KDs at the ballpark watching my kids play,” she says. “In fact, I met a woman at Appalachian University, we got to talking and realized that we came from the same chapter. What a wonderful experience!”

To read more about Stolen Horse International, visit [www.netposse.com](http://www.netposse.com).

<http://friends.kappadelta.org/alumnaecontent.aspx?item=Connection/Alumnae/kdconnect ionmarch2007.xml>