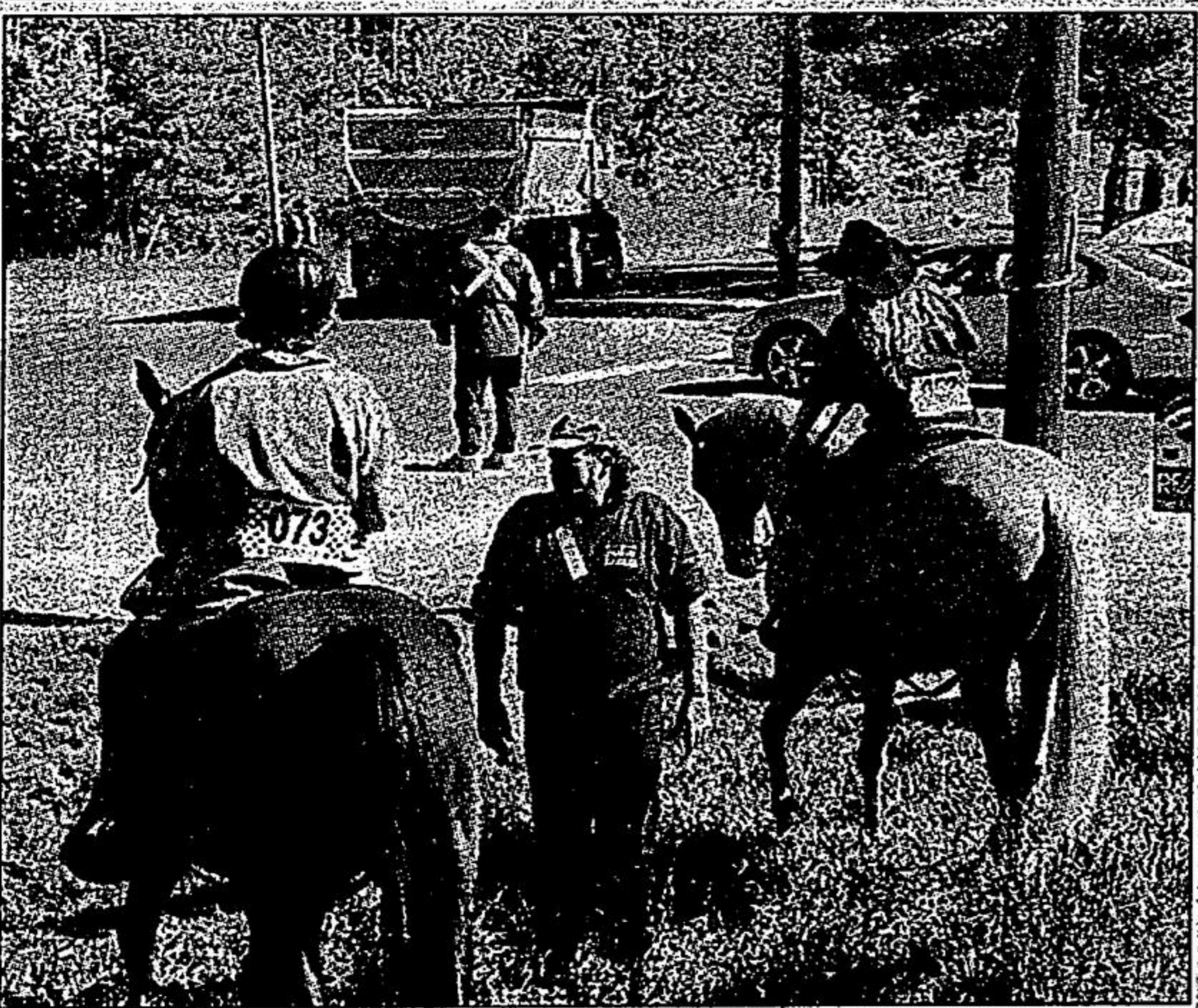
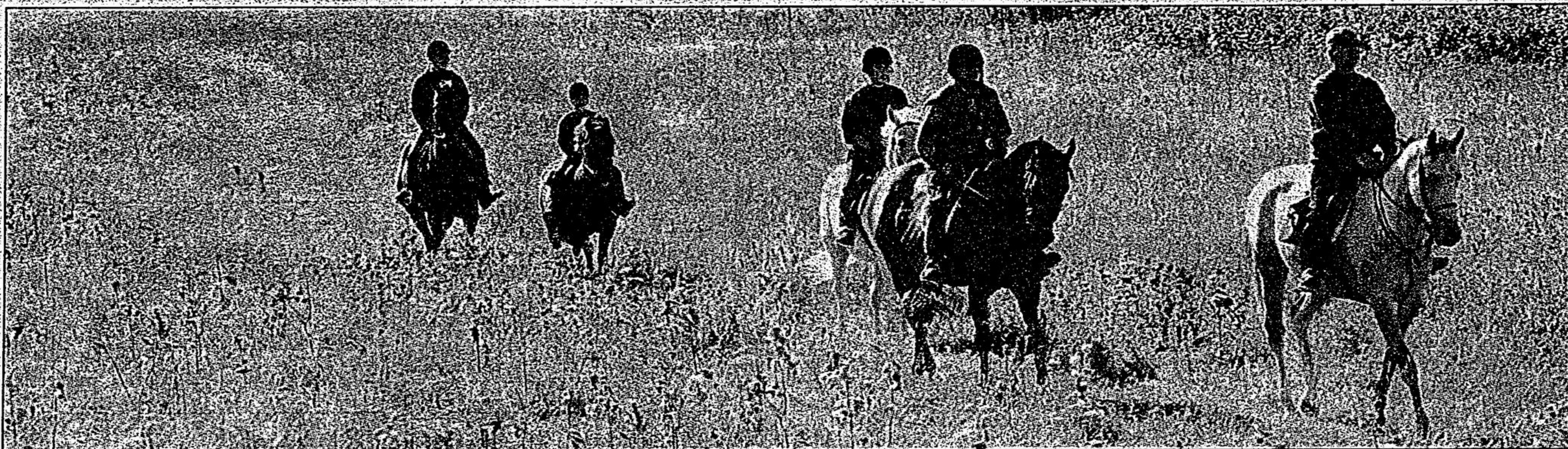


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ETCETERA

The Great Canadian Ride for Cancer



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GREAT CANADIAN RIDE FOR CANCER

Riders cross a meadow in the York Regional Forest (top) during last year's Great Canadian Ride for Cancer. Dan Coates (centre) supervises Mary Anne Strano (left) and Lynn Goldman as they cross Aurora Road at McCowan Road. Scott Butcher (on the road) was one of 60 volunteers helping along the route.

Cancer survivor helps others keep fighting

BY AMY WEST
Staff Writer

Through nine months of daily chemotherapy and another month of radiation, Dan Coates lay in a hospital bed and thought about Joey.

The desire to see Joey and spend time with him gave Coates something to hold on to after being diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma in August 1992.

Joey couldn't visit Coates in the hospital, nor could he pick up the phone and call.

Joey is a horse.

"When I got out of the hospital and was able to visit (Joey) it was like he understood that something was wrong," said Coates. "He was so gentle and careful with me."

Coates credits his 12-year-old appendix quarter-horse gelding with helping him win his fight against the disease that killed more than 63,000 Canadians last year.

Coates was determined not to become a statistic.

"I never gave up (during treatment) and I never stopped fighting. I wasn't going to just roll over and die."

Now 29 years old, Coates has been in remission for almost eight years and has been able to resume his normal routine.

But he hasn't forgotten the struggle he had to go through to get there.

"A lot of people struggle both emotionally and financially," Coates explained. "I was lucky enough not to have the financial struggle but I wanted to do something to help others who might not be as fortunate."

Since horses were his passion, Coates decided to use his equine knowledge to start a fundraising event.

So in September 1994, nine riders from the Whitchurch Pony Club gathered at Al's Tack Shop in Stouffville for the first Great Canadian Ride for Cancer.

The event is a 25-kilometre rideathon in the York Regional Forest near Stouffville. Riders collect pledges and spend the day on the trails. Morning snacks, lunch and treats for the horses are all provided.

"I had approached the Canadian Cancer Society about doing the event," said Coates. "They came out to the house for a meeting with me and gave me the OK to go ahead with it."

"I got my family and friends to help out with flyers and lunch and we raised \$900 in pledges."

The next year, attendees increased to 12 riders.

"The third year, we really re-thought our strategy. That's when we went after corporate sponsors, started with radio checkpoints and started advertising in newspapers and on the radio," explained Laurie Smith, secretary and treasurer for the Great Canadian Ride for Cancer.

Smith has been involved with the ride since its inception.

See RIDING, page 17.

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