

# VALLEY VISTA *Neighbors*

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## *Robin Hutton:* **Champion of Animal War Heroes**



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Cover Photo by Julie Campbell





By Ken Phillips

## Robin Hutton: Champion of Animal War Heroes

Robin Hutton, a Wildwood Ranch Estates resident, has spent years trying to gain recognition of the heroic deeds of animals which made extraordinary contributions during times of war. The United States has always used animals to help the military battle its enemies, but our country has never formally acknowledged their contributions. That is about to change thanks to Robin's efforts.

Robin Hutton relaxing at home in Wildwood Ranch Estates. Photo by Julie Campbell.

On November 14, 2019, some of America's war hero animals were cited for their bravery during a stirring ceremony at the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress and event organizers from the National Marine Corps League and Robin's non-profit called Angels Without Wings, Inc. were present to honor these cherished animal war veterans.

The day also launched the International War Animals Museum, which is hoped to find a permanent home in Washington, DC. Robin said, "This is where people for generations to come will learn history through the eyes of the animals and be able to pay their respects and gratitude to these four-legged and winged heroes."

Robin is passionate about her work and looks to every day as a new opportunity to promote heroic animals. The initial inspiration for these efforts came in the form of a small mare called Reckless, which served as a pack horse in the Marine Corps in the Korean War. During the Battle of Outpost Vegas, Reckless braved the battlefield, making an astounding 51 brutal round trips across rough, steep, frozen terrain to bring ordinance to the troops she served. Under fire the entire day, she carried nearly two tons of ammunition and was shot twice, but kept going.

After the war, Reckless was awarded two Purple Hearts, a Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, and other military



Robin receives inaugural Sgt. Reckless Award from the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. Photo by Rhonda Hile.



Robin Hutton loves animals. Photo by Julie Campbell.



Robin with brother Michael. Photo by Julie Campbell.

honors. In 1959, she was stationed at Camp Pendleton and promoted to Staff Sergeant in an official ceremony that included a 19-gun salute and a 1,700-man parade in her honor.

There is now a permanent, national statue of the four-legged war hero at the base and five more monuments will have been installed by this spring all over the country. Robin is also working with the South Korean government to place a statue in their country.

Toward the end of World War II, in 1943, Great Britain's animal welfare charity, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), began awarding the Dickin Medal – a rough equivalent of an animal Victoria Cross for bravery. Due to Robin's efforts, Reckless was awarded the Dickin in England; only the fourth equine, and first American horse, to receive such an honor. The medal was presented to a Marine Corps attaché and Robin in 2017 by Queen Elizabeth's cousin, HRH Princess Alexandra.

This well-deserved acknowledgement spurred Robin on. She has since traveled back to England to research her latest book – “War Animals: The Unsung Heroes of World War II.” She nominated Chips, a World War II Army dog that had guarded Roosevelt and Churchill at the 10-day Casablanca Conference during the war, for a Dickin Medal, which was awarded in 2018.

Robin has relentlessly promoted Reckless around the world, mounted campaigns for monuments to her, created merchandise, and is currently trying to develop a movie or television series. Through her non-profit organization, Robin is also spearheading a new medal program called Animals in War & Peace Medal of Bravery, hoping this effort will result in a Congressional award equivalent to the Dickin.

In November 2019, she was awarded the Inaugural Sgt. Reckless Award by the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Ft. Worth, TX for her work honoring Sgt. Reckless and animals that have served our country.



Sgt. Reckless statue by artist Jocelyn Russell. Photo by Robin Plutton.

Robin is unquestionably an animal lover. She has three rescue dogs: Misty, an Australian Shepherd, Ozzie, a Boston Terrier/Beagle mix, and Grace, some kind of a terrier/Pomeranian/Chihuahua blend.

When she has time, Robin loves to play tennis and golf, ski, wine taste, and go to movie night at McCrea Ranch in the summer. She also helps other non-profits with fundraising efforts by donating her books and Sgt. Reckless merchandise.

Robin bought her house in Wildwood in 1998, sold it in 2016, and moved back in it again in 2018 with her brother Michael Holzbeierlein. “It’s heaven,” she said. “I fell in love with the Santa Rosa Valley the moment I drove down the Norwegian Grade for the first time and saw that great view. When I sold the house in 2016, I went into the attic and wrote it a love letter. Over the years, it was filled with love, laughter, even tears, and wonderful Christmas parties. I had to come back to my safe comfortable, beautiful home.”

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She appreciates the space in the area and getting away from the “crazy city,” but she likes the access, if she wants to go over the hill. She said, “I also like finding wonderful surprises along the various trails. On a recent trip off of E. Los Posas, I discovered a zoo next to the fantastic Al Lago Winery. And, then, up the Bridlewood trail there was a beautiful waterfall and creek . . . such beauty in our own backyard!”

To Robin, her community is “absolutely wonderful.” She says her neighbors watch each other’s backs, including when her friend Tonia Allen Gould created a neighborhood watch program for safety.

Robin’s personal motto is something she has “plastered in my home and office.” It’s from a friend, singer, songwriter Templeton Thompson, who wrote: “Dream Big – Work Hard – I Have Faith.” She noted, “These words have served me incredibly well and inspired me so many times, especially, in the harder times. I think if we all did this, what a wonderful world it would be!”

When she was going through a particularly difficult, “dark time” some ten years ago, she stumbled upon a book that changed her life. It was “Happy for No Reason” by Marci Shimoff. “It taught me to find a little piece of joy every day,” she said. “Each day got easier, brighter and brighter, until, one day, the pity party pooped out and I was happy. But not for no reason.

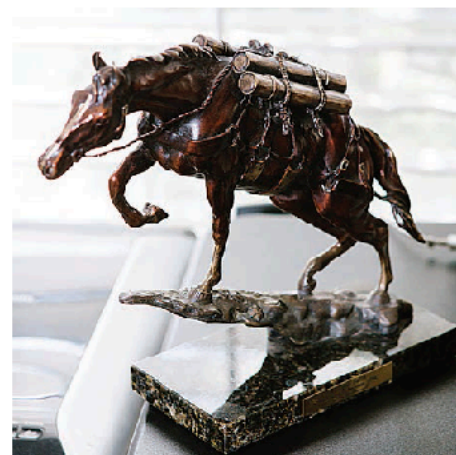
“I finally realized how incredibly blessed and beautiful life was and how much more I could do to fulfill my purpose in life. Suddenly, the world opened up to me and I realized that joy is in the journey and, whatever life throws at you, try to be mindful that the hard times will pass and to fiercely enjoy the ride for as long as you can.”

Her journey has taken a number of turns. The oldest of five children, she grew up in Alexandria, VA. Her father passed away when she was young, so the family moved to New York. Robin graduated Magna Cum Laude from Ithaca College and a year later relocated to California, where she began her career with Billy Jack Productions.



Robin with Sgt. Reckless monument during dedication to the equine war hero.

For some 35 years, Robin gained experience in all aspects of the motion picture business and event planning. She became a business partner of Tom (Billy Jack) Laughlin and Delores Taylor, with whom she co-authored



Sgt. Reckless statue. Photo by Julie Campbell.

several books. Robin’s first solo work was “Sgt. Reckless: America’s War Horse,” which became a New York Times Bestseller and garnered her many other accolades and prestigious awards over the past five years.

And Robin’s work is not close to being over. As president of her own non-profit, she is forging ahead with her many projects to champion and honor the brave war hero animals that have served our country.

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