

# Kathryn 'Kappy' Allen

## Lawyer and Her Trusty Steed Prove Childhood Dreams Can

By Patricia Colligan

**F**or some, the demands of adulthood can sap the time, motivation and inclination needed to pursue the dreams harbored as children.

Some, but not all.

Despite a successful professional career, the responsibilities of motherhood and even the anguish of surviving a broken back, 46-year-old Kathryn "Kap-py" Allen relishes the challenge of competing this month at the Star of Texas Fair & Rodeo.

Growing up on the family ranch in El Campo, Allen learned to ride horses at a young age, and it didn't take long for her to discover barrel racing.

"Every little girl who runs the barrels says 'I want to go to the National Finals Rodeo'," Allen says. Although she rode and competed, she never took the dream as far as she might have. "I never had the horse to really be at that level."

For the full-time lawyer and mother of two, barrel racing was a childhood passion that became a part-time hobby often put on hold. But as Allen approached 40, she realized the time was coming to decide whether to take a shot at making it to the finals. "I just thought, 'Oh, my career can't be over without at least trying,' and I mean really honestly trying."

Allen knew the key to success would be finding the right horse. "I decided really that I needed to bite the bullet and find the one," she says. "There was no point in trying unless you had the horse to do it with. But if I could find the horse, there was no point in not."

68th Star of Texas Fair  
& Rodeo/Rodeo Austin

March 12-26,  
Travis County Expo Center  
Rodeo competitions,  
carnival,  
14 nights of live music  
Tickets on sale now  
(Proceeds go to fund  
scholarships  
for Texas youth)  
[www.rodeoaustin.com](http://www.rodeoaustin.com)

Find him she did. Allen's sister, Leigh, first spotted the horse called Risky Chris at an Oklahoma City event. His owners weren't interested in selling him then, but persistence by Allen paid off in 1998. She brought 8-year-old Chris home in April that year, and they spent the rest of the year getting acquainted.

With tremendous support from family, friends and co-workers, Allen and Chris galloped into the 1999 rodeo season. Not only did they have a great year, but against all odds, they made it to the NFR.

Still, Allen wasn't satisfied. She wanted to give a horse with Chris' talent a chance to benefit from the year of experience now under her belt. The NFR "is a hard place for a first-timer. It's one of the places where you really do have to know the ropes in order to make the most of it," she says, "and I didn't feel like Chris got a fair shot."

She gave him that shot. Although they qualified two places lower, Allen and Chris earned their way to the NFR for a second year. And this time, they were ready. The careful combination of conditioning, skill, support, focus and good luck won them the 2000 World Champion Barrel Racing title.

But there was still one more thing Allen wanted: a place in the Olympic Command Performance Rodeo, which was created by the 2002 Salt Lake Olympic Committee as part of the Cultural Olympiad to highlight events culturally unique to the host country.

There were only five slots open on the barrel racing team, and those narrowed to only two options for getting on the team: taking the 2001 World Champion title again at the NFR or winning the Aggregate title (best



average time). Allen and Chris pulled out the Aggregate title, joined the team and took their place in Olympic history.

Despite how easy they have made it look, barrel racing is a physically grueling sport. Horse and rider cloverleaf around a set of three barrels at break-neck speed. Accidents happen all the time, both in and out of the ring; both Allen and Chris have suffered broken

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backs. Allen's right leg is currently in a brace; she tore ligaments when her foot nicked a barrel at a recent Fort Worth event.

But even in a brace, Allen is hard to keep up with. She and Chris are getting ready for the 68th Star of Texas Fair and Rodeo. Allen says she looks forward to competing at the Star of Texas Rodeo because "they take great pains to make sure they have a good barrel race."



*Kappy Allen and Risky Chris on their way to the barrel racing championship in the 2000 National Finals Rodeo, photo by Mike Copeman; with Risky Chris in a more sedate moment; and a close-up of Allen's championship buckle*

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But her focus is slowly shifting more to her sons, Kenny, 13, and Chris, 8. She wants to teach them not to be satisfied with less than all that they can do, and she's led by example. She's proved that she can make it to the top. And after Chris' remarkable recovery from the broken back to qualifying for the 2003 NFR, Allen says he's got nothing more to prove to her or anyone else.

"I love it, and we'll keep doing it," she says. They'll compete at the Star of Texas, and if they don't win, they will still have had fun. "But we'll giggle if we take their money." ★