

Valenzuela: Overlooked

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Every father should have daughters as devoted as Diane and Patricia Valenzuela.

The two women currently are taking steps to ensure that their father - renowned former jockey Ismael "Milo" Valenzuela - goes down in racing history as more than just a name on the statistical pages.

Remember Valenzuela? He's the one who rode Tim Tam to victory in the 1958 Kentucky Derby. Ten years later, he again captured the spring classic (through disqualification) - and also the Preakness - aboard Forward Pass.

But the pinnacle of his career occurred in the early 1960s when he rode five-time Horse of the Year Kelso to numerous stakes victories, including the Jockey Club Gold Cup (three times).

Valenzuela first caught the industry's attention at age 21, when he won the 1956 Californian Stakes on a horse named Porterhouse - beating Swaps. During the 30-year riding career that followed, Valenzuela won 2,547 races for earnings of more than \$20 million. Of those races, 112 were stakes.

In 1963, Valenzuela received the prestigious George Woolf Memorial Award as an all-around exemplary reinsman.

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His last major stakes win was on Destroyer in the 1974 Santa Anita Derby, but he didn't hang up his saddle for good until 1980. After that, he trained for awhile and branched out into breeding. Still living in Arcadia with Rosa, his wife of 40 years, Valenzuela is about to turn 60. He regularly assists his brother Martin, who trains on the California circuit.

I spoke with his daughter Diane, who works for the California Horse Racing Board, and she told me that she and her sister would like to see a book written about their father's life. Floyd Elkus, one of the owners Valenzuela rode for, had begun such a book in 1979, but Elkus died 10 years ago. Valenzuela's daughters also believe their father deserves to be in racing's Hall of Fame.

"My father not only had a great career, but he's a good, decent man," Diane said. "I think he's just been overlooked because he's no longer very active. But he's still around, and he still loves racing. You know, last year I overheard someone spreading a rumor that he was dead. I found that person and I told him, 'You're wrong. Milo Valenzuela is my father, and he's very much alive.'"

Yes, and very much overlooked, indeed.

□ *Anne Lang is the Texas breeding correspondent for Daily Racing Form.*