

Author of *Modern Gymnastics* and *Training the 3-Day Event Horse and Rider*

JIM WOFFORD

STILL



HORSE CRAZY



AFTER

ALL

THESE

YEARS



(If it didn't happen this way...



...it should have)

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A long, glorious summer stretched ahead of me—and in Ireland, too, the Emerald Isle. Ireland couldn't have been any greener than I was, but I figured I would substitute speed and enthusiasm for experience. Life was good. As a reward while I was on parole between high school and college, Mom had given me a choice of a summer in Germany doing dressage with Willi Schulteis or riding green horses in Ireland. My choice was to spend the summer working for an old family friend and one of Ireland's most successful horse dealers.



Cyril Harty, “the Captain,” had been on the Irish Horse Show Team in the 1930s (along with other famous Irish horsemen such as Captains

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Dan Corry and Fred Aherne) at the same time my father was on the U.S. team. They met as young officers and remained friends throughout their lives. Cyril Harty had 10 children, which meant my siblings and I usually had an instant pal our age when we arrived in Ireland. I was fortunate in my Irish alter ego, John Harty, who went on to be a champion steeplechase jockey as well as riding on the Irish eventing team at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

My father was also the U.S. military attaché to Ireland in 1939–40 and made many friends during his time there. This was a serious time to be an Army officer, as World War II had just started, and I have seen some of his letters from that period. Early in his assignment, he writes about beachfront fortifications and machine gun emplacements, items of great interest to professional soldiers. Later, his letters describe the racing and hunting side of Irish life, and one can tell his focus is changing. One letter mentioned that Daddy had run into Dan Corry, who was out walking his racing Greyhounds. With typical Irish generosity, Captain Corry invited my father for a day at the races, and Daddy accepted this invitation with alacrity. It was obvious that as time went on, my father fell more and more under the spell of the Irish horses and the people who love them. In his last letter to my mother before he transferred back to the United States, he closed by saying, “You know, I don’t think the Irish care if they are invaded or not.”

(When I was older, my Irish connection extended to that country’s wonderful horses. Take it from me, a good Irish horse can change your life. I rode an Irish horse at all but one of the international events I ever won, which explains my fondness for them.)

My magical 1962 summer started as soon as I landed in Ireland. Imagine getting in a taxi at the old Dublin Airport and immediately falling into

a serious debate with the driver as to whether Arkle or Mill House was the greatest steeplechaser that Ireland had ever produced, or “was dere a better in all tha Emerald Isle?” By the time I got to my destination, I had a lead on two of the “greatest young leppers” the world had ever seen, a tip on the 4:30 race at Punchestown Racecourse, and an invitation to an IRA fundraiser that evening at The Grasshopper, in the village of Clonee.

It was a wet summer, even for Ireland. The sun was out the morning I landed in Dublin and shone again the day I left—and it rained every day in between. When I mentioned this, I was told, “Yes, but it’s a dry rain.” The Irish have a subtle conception of the truth.

Despite the weather, I rode young sales horses every day for the next few weeks. The Captain had a steady stream of clients, and John and I presented likely prospects to them. Whatever technique and polish I had gained at Culver was going to have to suffice; at that time, the Irish were long on horse sense, but short on technique. It took a fair amount of “git ‘er done” to ride uneducated young stock over colored poles and up and down the few banks and ditches we had on the place.

I was on a strawberry roan mare one morning and had gotten the bucks out of her by the time The Captain drove up. I showed him her new tricks by circling a few times, riding a couple of figure eights, and changing back and forth from trot to canter. The Captain seemed happy enough with the progress of her flatwork and told me to pop her over the bank at the end of the field. “Okay,” I said. “Has she been over it before?” “Ah, no,” was the reply, “but her dam was a great lepper.” I wouldn’t say this one was great, but she had a good attitude, and we eventually scrambled back and forth successfully. I learned a lot about horses that summer, including what happened when horses from a good gene pool crossed paths with enthusiastic ignorance. Horses have an extraordinary desire to please

humans; they will put up with our most outlandish requests, if asked in a determined and confident manner. This was the first time I noticed this about horses, but it wouldn't be the last.

I was spending plenty of time in the saddle, but my chances for instruction were limited; when I got the chance to take a clinic with Major Joe Lynch, the coach of the Irish Olympic eventing team, I was ready. Joe had been in the British cavalry most of his life, and during World War II, he was a training officer in Scotland preparing troops for combat in North Africa, Sicily, and then Italy. Like many of his countrymen, he had a marvelous command of the English language, including a career soldier's use of profanity and obscenity, as well as an instinctive understanding of horses, and a deep appreciation of whiskey.

Given some of the more lurid tales he told after hours, we suspected that Joe was either about 105 years old or more than capable of embellishing a story. His age or his nightly intake could affect his coaching, and I have painful memories of him, still under the weather from the night before, standing on top of a cold, wet, wind-swept hill, red-faced and screeching at me in a British accent while obviously forgetting my name, "You theah, come heah, you [*expletive deleted*] imbecile, you, YOU! ...TREATY STONE! Come heah!" (He never forgot your horse's name, but you? Not so much.)

Treaty Stone, the horse Captain Harty had given me to ride at Joe's clinic, was a grey, seven-eighths Thoroughbred gelding, and one of the laziest horses I have ever ridden. I don't know if The Captain was mad at me, or just saw a chance to get his horse off the farm and educated at the clinic with Joe. Whatever the reason, Treaty took all the leg I had to get over the jumps—and then some. It wasn't exactly smooth and polished, but at least I got around. It must have looked a little better than it felt;

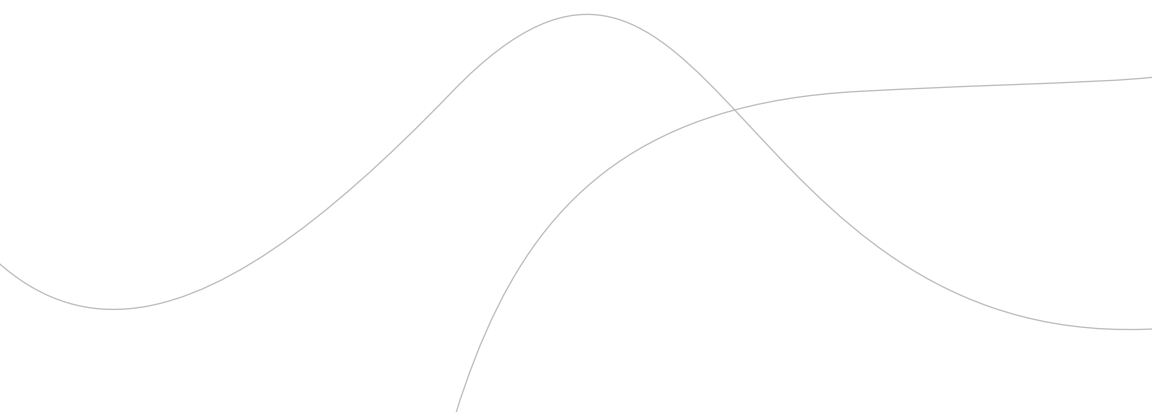
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John later told me that when I finished, Joe sniffed, and remarked that it “wasn’t too bad, for an American.”

I was sad to leave Ireland, where I had spent most of my time with horses, thus continuing my equestrian education. I now faced new challenges. When I left Dublin, I was headed for the University of Colorado, once again sentenced to academic incarceration. ■



Driving from Colorado Springs to San Antonio gave me an impromptu tour of the southwestern United States. Gail would follow later with Hillary, and I was alone with my thoughts for a couple of days. The Olympics were now safely on my resumé, and I had time to think about both my future and our future. I was just coming to grips with my new role as a father. In addition, I was nervous about my new role in the U.S. Army, and my new responsibilities.

I was assigned to the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Training Center (USMPTC) at Fort Sam Houston for the next two years. All I knew about my new job was that yet another old Army friend, Colonel Johnny Russell, would be my boss.

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My family connections stretched from Johnny to Colonel Mendenhall at the Army Sports program, and then back to Johnny. By a strange coincidence, my father had been Johnny's coach at the 1952 Olympics, and now Johnny would be my coach. Although self-awareness was not my strong suit, I was beginning to realize how lucky I was in my family's involvement with horses and with the Army. The shadow of the rainbow extended all the way to Texas, and my good fortune with it.

My family had been arranging the next chapter of our lives behind the scenes while I was training for the Olympics. Colonel Billy and Helen Greear, my brother Warren's godparents and close family friends, had just retired from the Army and Billy had accepted the position of City Manager for Terrell Hills, a nice suburb just outside the post at Fort Sam Houston. Gail and my mother reached out to the Greears, and made a quick inspection tour on their way to Mexico for the Olympics. This was news to me; they did not bother me with the details. By the time I heard of it, we had rented a lovely house at 913 Ivy Lane in Terrell Hills, about 10 minutes from USMPTC. While they were at it, Gail and Mom arranged stabling for our horses at Johnny Russell's civilian stables and found a wonderful babysitter for Hillary.

Basically, all I had to do once I got to San Antonio was report in to "*HqCo, Fort Sam Houston, Tx nlt 2Jan69.*" In obedience to my mimeographed orders, not later than the morning of January second, I presented myself to the Headquarters Company First Sergeant (aka "Top"), gave him my orders and my 201 file, and was told to get a haircut. Based on my Army experience, this command was a reflex for all senior NCOs (non-commissioned officers). It was usually partnered with constructive criticism about my posture, general appearance, and dismal prospects for future success in this man's Army. I replied that I completely understood

the First Sergeant's helpful comments and promised to improve every aspect of my Army performance. Mollified by my obsequious response, Top directed me toward the USMPTC stables and dismissed me.

FNG Learns the Ropes

— Some people at the stables were glad to see me. Johnny showed me around, first introducing me to another old Army friend, Master Sergeant Harry Cruzan. He was the NCOIC USMPTC Stables in Army parlance, Stable Sergeant to the rest of the world. I was knee-high the first time I met him, when he was Fuddy Wing's groom at the 1948 Olympics, and our paths had occasionally crossed since then.

Johnny's plan was that I would take over from Harry, once my promotion to "Specialist 5" (sergeant) came through. There was a slight hitch in his plan: I needed another couple of months as a corporal before I would be eligible for promotion. This all sounded fine with me; I was just happy to be in a situation that involved horses. If I had the chance to ride all day, I didn't much care if I was a private or an NCO. However, I changed my mind about that after a few days.

I expected a certain amount of hazing whenever I got to a new post. The Army term is "FNG"—most of the acronym stands for "New Guy." So, I was the FNG. Johnny introduced me and left me to get acquainted. My reception was definitely chilly, which I understood. Most of the stable crew had been there for a year or more and were counting the days until they could return to civilian life. The stable operation consisted of six to eight riders, a farrier, a carpenter, and a civilian night watchman. For the most part, crew members were assigned because they could ride well enough to re-school the Pentathlon horses.

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Compared to the small operation Gail and I had been running in New Jersey, I was going to be in charge of a much bigger organization. It occurred to me later that Johnny might have been worried about our relationship, as I had been on a first-name basis with him since I could remember. But I had also been raised with the Army, and during business hours I stood up when he came into the stable office, called him “Colonel Russell,” replied with “Yes, sir,” or “No, sir,” and tried to be a model NCO. After business hours at his facility north of town (Johnny was effectively running two programs at the same time), we were on a first name basis, but there was an invisible line between us, and throughout my time at the USMPTC I was careful never to cross it.

The USMPTC was the Olympic center for modern pentathlon, much as Gladstone was for the equestrian team. Officers from the various services sent likely candidates to us for training. It was possible, but rare, for civilians to participate. Young officers who could either run or swim at a near-Olympic level were assigned to the USMPTC on a trial basis. There they were coached in all five pentathlon disciplines—running, swimming, fencing, shooting, and riding. The riding part is where the stable crew came in; we rode the horses that developed bad habits. Most of the athletes who came through the program had no experience with horses, which was the reason for the bad habits our horses developed, yet within 90 days these young men had to be able to draw a horse’s name out of a hat and successfully complete a 3-foot, 6-inch show-jumping course with it—*90 days!* Think of that the next time you struggle with improving your riding skills. The pressure on these aspiring pentathletes was enormous; if they washed out of the pentathlon program in the late 1960s, most were destined to be reassigned as platoon leaders in Vietnam. At that point, their life expectancy would be measured in hours

and days, not in years. All elite athletes are motivated, but these guys were *really* motivated. By the time these first or second lieutenants arrived at USMPTC to begin their riding instruction, they would have recently set NCAA records in running or swimming. (The theory was that the three “skill sports”—fencing, shooting, and riding—could all be taught, while the ability to run or swim at an elite level was determined more by pure athletic gifts than by practice.) Working at the USMPTC was my first experience with teaching on a regular basis, and I was learning faster than the pentathletes.

I noticed immediately that these super-fit athletes, who had recently won big college running or swimming competitions, quivered with fatigue after only a few minutes in the saddle, and I realized that riding fitness is different from running and swimming fitness. Another insight: the runners made better riders than the swimmers. It made sense to me, as runners were typically long and lean, used to relaxing their arms while their legs did all the work. Swimmers, on the other hand, were usually shaped like a wedge, and tended to move their arms and shoulders rather than their legs. Both could learn, but it helped to have the right physique to begin with.

My early exposure to Colonel Chamberlin’s style of teaching now came in handy. Colonel Russell had been brought up in the cavalry tradition, and his teaching, based on Chamberlin’s writings, reflected it; therefore, I spoke his language immediately, and was able to impart it to my students. Soon after I arrived, I was designated as the assistant riding instructor.

I’d like to think my students improved, but Colonel Russell was the driving force of the program. When the athletes reported to the stables daily, he assigned two horses for each to ride. In addition, the stable riders were assigned horses who needed remedial jumping before being put back

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on the athletes' list. We schooled these horses along with the athletes, sometimes acting as visual role models, sometimes bringing up the rear of the session if our "schoolies" had behavioral problems. The athletes rode two sets, then continued their training in the other four disciplines. For the rest of the morning, we schooled the rest of the horses on the flat or over fences as required.

Colonel Russell had an uncanny knack of knowing which horse to select for each rider. As horses rotated on and off the re-schooling list, I knew after a while which ones just needed some negative reinforcement to get them jumping again, and which needed to canter over small fences for a day or so to rebuild their confidence. Although some of the other crew members resented riding such an amazing array of stoppers, buckers, runaways, nappers, and general equine miscreants, I regarded it as a graduate degree in how to ride. If I could learn to deal with all the problems these poor horses presented, I could do anything with horses. The analogy I used with the crew members was that if we were graduate psychiatrists, we would want to work in a mental institution; while there, we would see a little bit of everything. As riders at the center, we would meet every kind of problem a horse could present and have Colonel Russell to guide us through the rehabilitation process. Thanks to my experiences in Texas, I'm rarely surprised by a horse's misbehavior; chances are I've seen it before.

Mornings were busy, considering that we had between 55 and 85 horses in work year-round. Their care was rudimentary. After riding we untacked each horse, put a halter and lead rope on, and tied it to a picket line that ran down the middle of the outside asphalt apron. Once we had 20 horses or so tied to each side of the picket line, we got out the fire hose.

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My eyes bugged out the first time I witnessed this process. I had come from Gladstone, where meticulous horse care was a religion, yet now we were going to wash an entire herd of horses at once. It was not as barbaric as you might think; the trickiest part was turning the fire hose on to the required water pressure. Not enough pressure, and you could not reach the entire herd from one spot; too much pressure and the hose would escape. This set the nozzle swinging wildly back and forth across the pavement like a scythe of death until several brave crew members tackled and subdued it while the other crew members adjusted the pressure. Once correctly focused, the hose was directed skyward, creating an instant rainstorm. The horses, used to this treatment, shut their eyes and pinned their ears back until the downpour subsided.

At this point the hose was shut off and several crew members started down the line with sweat scrapers. Each horse was scraped, then the trustworthy ones were released and told to get back to their stalls. After a few days I accepted this as an efficient means of getting a large number of horses cleaned off; if the horses were okay with it, I guess I was too. Possibly the horses involved knew that most of them were one step ahead of an Alpo can when their owners donated them to the USMPTC, and thus accepted their lot in life as high-level school horses for unschooled riders.

And my goodness, were these riders unschooled! Some of the stunts they got up to on horseback still make me laugh. My very first day, Johnny was showing me around, and took me down to see the large outdoor sand arena. Two athletes were riding around in it. Stopping at the gate, Johnny watched them for a second, then with an evil smile said, "Watch this." These riders had been trotting, but they soon switched to cantering large circles that increased in speed and size until both horses had built up a good head of steam. The riders were locked in the reins, desperately

looking down at their horses' necks, paying no attention to each other. You guessed it: In less time than it takes to tell, those two had ridden from a wide-open gallop into a perfect head-to-head collision. It sounded as if a watermelon had dropped out of a second-story window, and both horses were a bit wobbly as they staggered away. Johnny mildly remarked to the two miscreants they should look where they were going and told them to carry on. "Stuff like that happens every day around here," he muttered to me as we walked back toward the stables.

"I can hardly wait," I thought to myself.

FNG Takes the Reins

— Soon after I arrived, Harry Cruzan retired, having served for 35 years, and a master sergeant was brought down as a placeholder NCOIC while I waited for my promotion to come through. I kept my head down, my mouth shut, and rode the horses assigned to me. The schedule at the stables started when we mucked out at six in the morning. Pancho, the night watchman, would have already fed the horses and had a 5-gallon urn of coffee ready for us. This was noteworthy for two reasons. Except for me, most of the crew would be suffering from the effects of either alcohol or marijuana and needed a stimulant to get them going. I was older than most of them, married, and still considered myself an athlete; I only needed coffee to help me wake up. In addition, Pancho's coffee was not just bad, it was spectacularly awful. Such was the crew's typical morning condition that in order to get some caffeine they gagged it down. Johnny showed up just before the pentathletes arrived, stopped by the office, poured a cup of coffee, shuddered, and stepped out to the assignment board to match riders with horses.

Before my promotion came through, I noticed that most mornings an Army staff car with a driver pulled up to the stables at seven. A middle-aged man dressed in old-fashioned “bat-wing” britches, highly polished three-buckle brown riding boots, and a khaki shirt with no markings stepped out. He would select a bridle and saddle from the tack room, throw the saddle on a Thoroughbred chestnut gelding called Upland, step aboard, and ride away. He returned just before eight, untacked Upland, left him in his stall, hung up his tack, and stepped back into his car.

All this went unremarked by the crew, who seemed to accept it as a normal procedure. After observing a few repetitions, I asked Johnny about it. He told me that the man in question was Major General Francis Murdoch, recently assigned to Fort Sam Houston as the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Third Army. General Murdoch liked to ride, and two-star generals, like 500-pound gorillas, went wherever they wanted. I filed away the crew’s lack of attention and put it on my list of things I wanted to change once I was given a chance.

Change was certainly coming to the Center; several malcontents left, and several FNGs were assigned to the stable crew. They were all good riders, including Mason Phelps, Trip Harting, Gould (“Peanut”) Brittle, and Mike Hunter.

We also got a new farrier, T.R. Smith, and a new carpenter, Mike Klepzig. Meanwhile, I had to put on my full green army uniform (we usually reported for work in fatigue jackets, blue tee-shirts, rust-colored britches, and black boots) in order to report to a Promotion Board.

I didn’t get the same reaction from my Board as General Tuckerman used to get. (If you recall, he told me years earlier that each of his promotions resulted from his having given a spooked four-year-old “a hell of a ride” through a scattered military parade as a young officer.) But

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I seemed to satisfy the Board that I could be “*promoted E-5, designated MOS 91T40, and assigned NCOIC USMPTC.*” All this Army jargon meant that I was now the equivalent of a sergeant, “Specialist 5,” which meant I got a pay raise, an increase in my housing allowance, and could officially take over at the stables with my new veterinary technician MOS designation.

I had been looking forward to this, as the crew had gotten pretty slipshod in their attitudes, and the two “lifer” sergeants before me had just been putting in their time until retirement. I wanted a new attitude around the stables and explained to the crew at my first staff meeting that although Colonel Russell had a friendly, relaxed way of conducting himself, he was still a colonel, and we would observe the correct military courtesies around him: stand up when he came in the office, hustle when he “suggested” something, ride the horses he said to ride in the way he said to ride them, and life would be good. If he decided you were not pulling your weight (and by implication, if I thought the same), you could start practicing Vietnamese as a second language. The gist of my message to them was that this was a sweet assignment. If they would shine their boots, salute, and say “Yes-sir-no-sir” they would get away with murder for the duration of their Army career.

Part of the laxity in our program was caused by the Texas heat. We started early, riding while it was cool. The horses were washed and put up before lunch, and several stable crew members could quickly knock out the tack. This left little to do in the afternoons, and most of the riders drifted away for a siesta in the barracks adjacent to the stables. Some of them came back, but there was no roll call, and not much going on at the stables; usually, afternoon attendance dropped off considerably. If I needed someone, they could usually be found in the bunkhouse. It had

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rudimentary kitchen facilities, a lounge with a television set, hot showers, bunk beds upstairs, and little else to recommend it beyond proximity.

Another source of the laxity was a growing misconception among the crew that our daily six o'clock starting time was a suggestion, not a rule. One of the crew, Mike Hunter, started sleeping in later and later, and the previous NCOIC was disinclined to climb the stairs and roust him out of bed. Once I took over, I told Mike it was a new day and a new way, and he was to start with everybody else. Naturally, he slept in, so I walked upstairs and dumped a large bucket of cold water on him. Mike went from a deep drunken sleep to a burning rage in no time and came out of the sodden mess of bed clothes, promising to whip my ass for me. Considering I was not still drunk, and had him by 4 inches and 50 pounds, I wasn't too worried. However, it never got that far. When he jumped out of bed with his fists clenched, he stepped into a puddle, both of his feet shot out from underneath him, and he landed flat on his back, knocking his wind out of him. I reminded Mike we all started at six and walked out. He slept in again the next day but heard my step on the bottom stair plus the clank of my water bucket and leapt out of bed, promising to be at work immediately. I had no more trouble with Mike, and the rest of the crew smiled and went about their business. But as long as I was there, we all started on time.

I had not been warned by my predecessors about Colonel Whiting. While Colonel Russell was the USMPTC Head Coach and Head Riding Coach, Colonel Whiting was the Commanding Officer of the whole operation. He had a four-thirty golf tee-time every Friday. He told his office staff that he was going to inspect one of the five training facilities, left work early, made a cameo appearance at a facility, and drove on to the Officer's Club in time for his weekly golf game. A week or so after I took over, it was my turn to entertain Colonel Whiting. He rolled up, got out

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puffing a big cigar, and asked to “see Private Klepzig,” my newly assigned carpenter, who was usually employed in repairing jumps, fences, and seeing to general maintenance around the stables. I stammered and stuttered a bit, saying I was sure he could be found if I went looking for him. Colonel Whiting delivered a stern lecture to the effect that every man needed to do his military duty right up until five o’clock, even on Fridays, and I had to be there, supervising all of them. Thus suitably reprimanded, I assured him it would be done, and I would personally see to it.

One of the first items on my list of “things to change” happened at seven in the morning most days. The change was obvious immediately: when General Murdoch appeared for his morning ride, Upland was tacked up and standing in the cross-ties. His mane was pulled, the hoof oil on all four hooves was correctly applied, and his saddle and bridle showed the loving application of elbow grease and saddle soap. While the crew was mucking out, I was in the office, dealing with the unending stream of Army paperwork. When General Murdoch walked through I stood and said, “Good morning, sir.” He replied absentmindedly and continued through to his morning ride. Occasionally his office called to say the general would not be in the stables until such and such a date. I would seize the moment; I had already assigned Mason to Upland on the days when General Murdoch didn’t ride, and Johnny did not assign the horse to a pentathlete.

Upland—as I’ve mentioned, a gorgeous bright chestnut Thoroughbred—was 16.2 hands, with no chrome. He carried 90 percent of his considerable weight on his forehand and had a mouth like cold iron. In addition, jumping higher than 3-foot fences on him was a potentially lethal exercise; he had as little jumping talent as any Thoroughbred I have ever seen, thus Johnny rarely put him in the athletes’ string. I handed Mason, who was a super rider, a double bridle and told him to “put a mouth on

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that son-of-a-bitch.” Knowing the situation was in good hands, I then put it out of my mind.

As part of the pentathletes’ training, we took them to horse shows. Right after I assumed responsibility at the stables, I got to the office early to make plans for shipping horses to a show the coming weekend. Sitting at the desk, I watched as Pancho poured water into the coffee machine, sprinkled some Folgers in, put the top back on, and flicked the switch. I turned back to my paperwork, then paused.

Calling Pancho back, I asked him if he had dumped yesterday’s grounds and rinsed the machine. Pancho looked at me as if I had crawled out from under a rock, replying that he *never* rinsed it out; that took too much time. He just filled it up, sprinkled more coffee on top, and it was ready to dispense coffee to the crew. He dumped the basket when it got full; otherwise, “saving money on coffee, by not using so much.”

Finally, an explanation for the vile potion inflicted on the crew.

Upon lifting the lid, I was greeted by a substantial green crust on top of used grounds, with small green sprigs of some volunteer plant sticking out. The entire inside of the container was completely black. I sternly explained that from now on the machine and basket were to be cleaned until spotless every morning, and only new coffee grounds were to be used. Pancho took the machine away, grumbling about the expense.

A few minutes later I sampled a fresh batch of coffee. It wasn’t nectar and ambrosia, but it was a huge improvement. Colonel Russell arrived, reached for a mug and poured himself a cup, almost visibly preparing to be poisoned. A smile came over his face after the first sip. He nodded to me and went out to the aisle. I smiled too, thinking that the prospects of my keeping this job were improving, and turned back to my shipping list; we had a show to go to and I wanted to be ready.



I may have come home from Germany with my tail between my legs, but I had a tiger by the tail when I got back to Virginia. I already had a small working-student program when I left for England in July to go into training for the Munich Olympics and had left my young horses in work with the students. I put Kathy Newman (née Doyle) in charge. She managed the sale of a couple of horses but several still needed new homes. As part of helping to keep my horses in work, my working students had agreed to get instruction at the local horse shows from Kathy. These were teenagers who had started taking regular lessons from me, and they needed adult supervision. My plan with Kathy was that



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STILL HORSE CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

although I would be gone for most of the summer, I would get home as quickly as I could, check in the following morning at Colony Farm, and get ready to train for the few fall events available. (The facility, located east of Middleburg, is still there, although now called Fox Chase.)

I made good time driving from Gladstone, and—since I would go past Colony Farm on my way home—decided I might as well surprise everybody and stop by for evening stables. I had stalls all down the long side of the west end of the barn for the horses, and a tack room halfway down the aisle. There was no one around when I parked, but I heard loud radio music and raucous laughter coming from the tack room—and saw an empty beer can fly out of the tack room window to join a sizeable heap of beer cans, empty potato chip bags, and other evidence of a typical barn party. Just as I stepped around the corner and into the tack room, I heard the distinctive sound of a new can of beer opening.

Sticking my head into the tack room, I said, “Hi, guys.”

Well. “Deer in the headlights” doesn’t begin to describe the looks on the perpetrators’ faces, especially two of them—with fresh cans of beer in their hands—I knew to be well below legal drinking age.

I made some remark about when the cat’s away, the mice will play, but to make that work, you had to know where the cat was at all times. You never saw evening stables done in such record time, with the aisle swept, tack cleaned, and evidence of their misdeeds removed. I looked at the work list, said that would be fine and that I would see everyone at morning stables. Driving home, I had to laugh, but I also realized I was going to have to keep a close eye on these kids. As I’ve mentioned more than once, eventers of that era prided themselves on a work-hard, play-hard attitude, but I could already see I was going to have to emphasize that work-hard part a little more.

Gail, Hillary, and Jennifer arrived the next day, and we settled into a routine that was determined by horses and the demands of a young family. Without foreseeing it, I had started my working student program just in time to catch the wave of enthusiasm our silver medal at Munich had inspired. Along with Jack Le Goff's competitive success, Neil Ayer was the cause of much of this; he was tireless in his efforts to expand the sport at every level. Within two years, the USCTA had grown from several hundred members to more than a thousand, and Jack Le Goff was implementing a new "rider in residence" program at Gladstone. Eventing was starting to fire on all cylinders.

Beginnings... and an Ending

— By October of 1973, Neil had organized the first truly international U.S. event at his Ledyard Farm, paying the way for foreign riders to fly their horses over to compete. It didn't hurt Neil's publicity efforts that Princess Anne and her fiancé, Captain Mark Phillips, were among the elite competitors. For the first time, U.S. eventers competed in front of a sizeable crowd.

My mother came back East for the event, as both Kilkenny and Foster were retiring before the final show jumping. I rode Henry while Jimmie Powers rode Foster. Waiting in the warmup ring, Jimmie and I figured once the announcer started his spiel, we would each canter around and jump a few fences on our own. When we could tell the announcer was getting to the end of his script, we would gallop from opposite back corners of the arena, turn down the center of the arena together at a high rate of speed, and jump the Myopia Hunt Club panel knee-to-knee in stride. We hit the panel on lovely flowing forward strides as planned and pulled up in front

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STILL HORSE CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

of the main grandstand to salute and dismount. Henry and Foster thought this was a great giggle and the crowd loved it, giving us a big hand as we led the horses out of the stadium. However, Jack (who hadn't been in on the plan) stopped us and said, "Well, that was very nice, boys...but I would not have been happy if it did not work."

After the festivities Sunday afternoon, we drove Mom and the girls home to Middleburg; Monday was a school day for Hillary, and our lives were increasingly circumscribed by what was best for her and Jennifer. Sometimes, horses had to play second fiddle. Gail threw a lovely party in early November to celebrate both Mom's visit and my twenty-ninth birthday. Mom stayed on for a few more days and flew home to Rimrock Farm in early November.

I never saw her alive again.

Later, I realized what Mom had done. When she set out to visit us for Ledyard, she had first stopped off to see each of my sister's five children in Kansas. Then she flew to England to see the "English Woffords," especially her three grandchildren there. She spent a few weeks in England, then returned to the United States to attend Ledyard. She had checked on each of her grandchildren and gone back to Kansas to die at home.

My sister, Dodie, said Mom was quite tired when she got home but continued to smoke and drink to excess, and it finally caught up with her. When they put her in the hospital in early December of 1973, Dodie called and said I had better come out, as Mom was fading fast. By the time I got to Junction City she had slipped into a coma, never to recover.

I was sad to lose Mom, but she had told me an interesting story while she was staying with us in Virginia. I came down one morning to find her sitting over her cup of coffee and a cigarette. When I remarked that she seemed to be in an especially good mood, she said she had dreamed

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Jim Wofford

of my father and it was the first time since he died 20 years earlier that in her dreams he was not suffering from the pain of colon cancer. They had been at a horse show with friends, having a good time. I said I was glad she had a good night's sleep, but the real import of what she said did not sink in for me until later. After the grand tour of her children and grandchildren, she'd decided it was time to go home and let go. She had been sad for more than 20 years, and now she wanted to be with Daddy, wherever that was. ■

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12. — When I grew up at Fort Riley, a cavalry post, thousands of horses lived there. Each trooper cared for his horse as if his life depended on it, which it did. Every horse on the post was exercised and groomed daily. Like most of the stables at the west end of the post, these were made of the limestone rimrock indigenous to the area. ■ © U.S. Army



13. — Our family life centered around horses, as shown here in our 1949 Christmas card. My siblings, Warren, Dodie, and Jeb, are mounted in the background, Mom and Dad are in the cart, while I am on my faithful Merrylegs. Out of the six members of the family, four of us would be on an Olympic team between 1932 and 1984. ■

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15. — One of the many things I wish I could have asked my father, Lieutenant John W. Wofford, was how it felt to ride into the 1932 Los Angeles Coliseum in front of 105,000 spectators, on a horse of dubious character. While Daddy finished covered with more dust than glory, he started a family Olympic tradition that lasted 75 years. ■ © U.S. Army



16. — My father riding Nigra, probably about 1930. Nigra had quite a career: on the back of this photo in my mother's handwriting is a note that Nigra was wounded in World War I and carried in her body shrapnel from that period. She was General Harry D. Chamberlin's ride at the 1920 Inter-Allied Games and would have been about 20 years old at the time of this photo. ■ © U.S. Army