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Foreword – by John Strassburger
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I INTRODUCTION

Horses have lurked in the periphery of my whole life. My father rode hunters and show jumpers in amateur classes in the 1920's, and hunted with the Fairfield and Westchester Hounds until the unpleasantness that followed the crash of 1929 put an end to those pastimes for him.

As his business fortunes revived somewhat he was determined to supply my two sisters and me with a modest horse apiece, which we cared for, rode around the Bedford, New York, countryside, and exhibited in local shows. Inevitably, as my sisters proved more competent as riders, I drifted away to strictly masculine teenage sports, and in due course World War II interrupted our family's horse ownership.

Some years later I became aware that my future wife Edie had a long standing and competing love affair with a bevy of equines: her old pony Buster, her father's ex-hunter Charlie, her neighbors the Kuhns' Ladybird, and a series of classy Thoroughbred hunters that she rode and showed for older Bedford ladies. One soft spring evening we visited some of these (the show hunters, not the older ladies) in their stable. There, in the dusk and warmth of their home, I found them beautiful, intriguing, and very cuddly – perhaps because those were also my feelings for the girl I was with.

Gentle inquiry disclosed that owning one of those animals – in fact any horse – was then economically far beyond our reach. I resolved then that some day I would make it possible for Edie to have such a horse of her own. And, more selfishly, I thought I might also enjoy its company.

A fall wedding was followed by the intermingling of children, army recall, and several job-related moves. Eventually we found ourselves living in suburban Chicago, with a horse-addicted young daughter among our four children. Riding lessons led to ownership of a small show hunter, which we boarded further out in the country.

A move to Connecticut expanded the horse opportunity, and eventually a succession of horses led to having two living at home, stabled in what was once a garage so that the cars could enjoy the outdoor weather. In due course our by now two horse-inclined daughters abandoned equines for college and the company of young gentlemen (at least we hoped they were



SMART FAMILY ARCHIVES

*The author's father and Freelance winning the Master's Plate,
Fairfield and Westchester Hounds Hunter Trials, c. 1930*



gentlemen), and their mother inherited the horses and discovered foxhunting in the Connecticut wilds.

A government job led to a move to Virginia, escalating Edie's hunting fever. Following government service, Upperville, Virginia, became our permanent home. In order avoid the perils of chasing foxes across uneven country at high speed, I took up breeding horses as a means of establishing contact with our horse-centered community. Soon thereafter, in the midnight presence of a tired broodmare and the foal she and we had just delivered, there was an epiphany – I became hooked on horses too.

For years I had thought of the human – horse relationship as that of master – servant, or perhaps, wise human – dumb animal. But over the last few years here in Virginia it has become clear that the connection is a lot more balanced and complex than that. In trying to understand that relationship lie the seeds of this book, for those are very special bonds that connect the horseman to his horse, and horse people to each other.

These interconnections tie much of our Northern Virginia Piedmont community into a web of love, respect, and interdependence, adding depth and meaning to our lives, and a living as well as a way of life for many of our friends and neighbors. This book is therefore an exploration into why people honor, revere, and love horses, how horses bring people together, how they permeate our culture and our economy, and a celebration of that special quality the horse lends to our existence.

One day a friend from Washington, an inhabitant of another world, was visiting us at the Orange County Point-to-Point. We stood on the hill by the announcer's stand, watching the preliminary hunt team relay races, a melange of horses, ponies, kids, pink coats, small jumps and spectators against a backdrop of spring meadows falling away to the Blue Ridge. Our friend Wendy said, almost in awe:

"It's just like a painting!"

And she was right. Art, it seems to me, is an effort to capture a moment so that it may be remembered, savored perhaps, for many years after its time is past. In the kaleidoscope of history nothing lasts forever. Our community of the horse will be no exception; in due course it will be assigned to its place on a shelf in the library of human memory.

So this is also a small effort to record some of the many dimensions of that community while it is still vibrant. Wherever possible we have tried to describe it through the actions and words of representative horses and horse people, though inevitably there is a considerable autobiographical element as

well. It is our hope that the reader will enjoy the picture now, and that through it our successors can with pleasure revisit the community and the country we love long after we are gone.



Afternoon on a shoulder of the Blue Ridge

EDITORIAL NOTE:

This work has been over four years in the making. As we assembled and arranged its elements, piece by piece, it eventually became apparent that the subject we were exploring was too diverse and extensive to fit comfortably within the covers of one reasonably sized book. And so we decided to produce it in three volumes:

Volume One, which you are now reading, describes many of the ways in which the horse has been and is now man's partner here in the Virginia Piedmont.

Volume Two, for which the draft manuscript is well along, will follow those relationships as they permeate the area's economy, covering the many support professions on which the horse depends.

Volume Three, will describe the institutions, art and literature that celebrate him; the threats that a changing world presents to our Community of the Horse; and the defenses that can preserve the best of what we have and love.

