

# *Black Beauty Wept*

*By Julie Lynn Andrew*



“Friday Night at the Shoe Sale”

I am not sure at what point in life you become horse crazy. Is it inherited? Is it a virus you are infected with when you first see a horse? In my case, my mother rode when she was pregnant with me and by the time I was three or four, I was sitting behind her on the saddle, arms wrapped around her middle, holding on as we took a friend’s horse “Brandy” out on trail rides. Brandy was an old-style American Saddlebred; wide and deep, with lots of substance, and a chess piece head, with a gorgeous kind eye. My mother would allow me to ride Brandy around the ring to walk him out, after the ride, and I would sit proudly on him going around the ring, reins dangling, while he allowed me to believe that I was entirely in control. American Saddlebreds are wise that way.

Not only was I exposed to horses in person, but I was an avid reader, and, you guessed it, many of the books I devoured were about horses. Anna Sewell's classic "Black Beauty" must be required reading for all little girls. I know that I, and all of my friends cut our teeth on this tale of sadness and light. Even now, I remember several passages, as if I had just read them for the first time. One, in which Ginger and Black Beauty discuss Ginger's life, is as follows:

*The next time that Ginger and I were together in the paddock she told me about her first place.*

*"After my breaking in," she said, "I was bought by a dealer to match another chestnut horse. For some weeks he drove us together, and then we were sold to a fashionable gentleman, and were sent up to London. I had been driven with a check-rein by the dealer, and I hated it worse than anything else; but in this place we were reined far tighter, the coachman and his master thinking we looked more stylish so. We were often driven about in the park and other fashionable places. You who never had a check-rein on don't know what it is, but I can tell you it is dreadful.*

*"I like to toss my head about and hold it as high as any horse; but fancy now yourself, if you tossed your head up high and were obliged to hold it there, and that for hours together, not able to move it at all, except with a jerk still higher, your neck aching till you did not know how to bear it. Besides that, to have two bits instead of one—and mine was a sharp one, it hurt my tongue and my jaw, and the blood from my tongue colored the froth that kept flying from my lips as I chafed and fretted at the bits and rein. It was worst when we had to stand by the hour waiting for our mistress at some grand party or entertainment, and if I fretted or stamped with impatience the whip was laid on. It was enough to drive one mad."*

*"Did not your master take any thought for you?" I said.*

*"No," said she, "he only cared to have a stylish turnout, as they call it; I think he knew very little about horses; he left that to his coachman, who told him I had an irritable temper! that I had not been well broken to the check-rein, but I should soon get used to it; but he was not the man to do it, for when I was in the stable, miserable and angry, instead of being smoothed and quieted by kindness, I got only a surly word or a blow. If he had been civil I would have tried to bear it. I was willing to work, and ready to work hard too; but to be tormented for nothing but their fancies angered me. What right had they to make me suffer like that? Besides the soreness in my mouth, and the pain in my neck, it always made my windpipe feel bad, and if I had stopped there long I know it would have spoiled my breathing; but I grew more and more restless and irritable, I could not help it; and I began to snap and kick when any one came to harness me; for this the groom beat me, and one day, as they had just buckled us into the carriage, and were straining my head up with that rein, I began to plunge and kick with all my might. I soon broke a lot of harness, and kicked myself clear; so that was an end of that place.*

*"After this I was sent to Tattersall's to be sold; of course I could not be warranted free from vice, so nothing was said about that. My handsome appearance and good paces soon brought a gentleman to bid for me, and I was bought by another dealer; he tried me in all kinds of ways and with different bits, and he soon found out what I could not bear. At last he drove me quite without a check-rein, and then sold me as a perfectly quiet horse to a gentleman in the country; he was a good master, and I was getting on very well, but his old groom left him and a new one came. This man was as hard-tempered and hard-handed as Samson; he always spoke in a rough, impatient voice, and if I did not move in the stall the moment he wanted me, he would hit me above the hocks with his stable broom or the fork, whichever he might have in his hand. Everything he did was rough, and I began to hate him; he wanted to make me afraid of him, but I was too high-mettled for that, and one day when he had aggravated me more than usual I bit him, which of course put him in a great rage, and he began to hit me about the head with a riding whip. After that he never dared to come into my stall again; either my heels or my teeth were ready for him, and he knew it. I was quite quiet with my master, but of course he listened to what the man said, and so I was sold again.*

*"The same dealer heard of me, and said he thought he knew one place where I should do well. 'Twas a pity,' he said, 'that such a fine horse should go to the bad, for want of a real good chance,' and the end of it was that I came here not long before you did; but I had then made up my mind that men were my natural enemies and that I must defend myself. Of course it is very different here, but who knows how long it will last? I wish I could think about things as you do; but I can't, after all I have gone through."*

*"Well," I said, "I think it would be a real shame if you were to bite or kick John or James."*

*"I don't mean to," she said, "while they are good to me. I did bite James once pretty sharp, but John said, 'Try her with kindness,' and instead of punishing me as I expected, James came to me with his arm bound up, and brought me a bran mash and stroked me; and I have never snapped at him since, and I won't either."*

*I was sorry for Ginger, but of course I knew very little then, and I thought most likely she made the worst of it; however, I found that as the weeks went on she grew much more gentle and cheerful, and had lost the watchful, defiant look that she used to turn on any strange person who came near her; and one day James said, "I do believe that mare is getting fond of me, she quite whinnied after me this morning when I had been rubbing her forehead."*

*"Ay, ay, Jim, 'tis 'the Birtwick balls'," said John, "she'll be as good as Black Beauty by and by; kindness is all the physic she wants, poor thing!" Master noticed the change, too, and one day when he got out of the carriage and came to speak to us, as he often did, he stroked her beautiful neck. "Well, my pretty one, well, how do things go with you now? You are a good bit happier than when you came to us, I think."*

*She put her nose up to him in a friendly, trustful way, while he rubbed it gently.*

*"We shall make a cure of her, John," he said.*

*"Yes, sir, she's wonderfully improved; she's not the same creature that she was; it's 'the Birtwick balls', sir," said John, laughing.*

*This was a little joke of John's; he used to say that a regular course of "the Birtwick horseballs" would cure almost any vicious horse; these balls, he said, were made up of patience and gentleness, firmness and petting, one pound of each to be mixed up with half a pint of common sense, and given to the horse every day.*

That passage from "Black Beauty" influenced me to a far greater degree than I could have known when I first read it. At first, it fluttered in the back of my mind as I was introduced to the American Saddlebred in more than a "headline" capacity. And later, as I began to show horses, and my family bought horses, it remained in the back of my mind. As an adult, it has moved further forward in my mind, seemingly the voice of the horse, speaking not of the "human condition," but of the "equine condition." The following describes my journey down a path eternally intertwined with this magnificent breed.

When I was about seven, we moved to Philadelphia's Main Line and my mother's job as a journalist took her, and me, to the Devon Horse Show. It changed the course of my life. As a small child, I would prowl each of the show barns, looking into the stalls, and trying to meet the horses. The hunter jumper people weren't much interested in me, but, there, in Barn 1, was Jim B. Robertson Stables. Horses whose names are still remembered and revered stood in their deeply-bedded stalls, and greeted me with warm muzzles and attentive faces.

Champions like Tashi Ling, Gold Treat, Special Entertainer, Precious, Forest Song, Reflections, Imperial Knight-- all royal sons and daughters from iconic Saddlebred families. One of the grooms, Cecil, nicknamed me "Little Bit", and endlessly shared his time and stories about each of these horses. He answered my countless questions, but more importantly, he let me be part of those horses' lives, even if only for a little while.

I remember that two barns up, was Dodge Stables. In the first stall stood a mare with a gleaming dark brown, almost black coat, and a ribbon of silver down her neck, where her mane had been roached off. She had huge dark eyes, and a narrow blaze, and her name was Lover's Sensation. All I knew was she was beautiful, and kind. I discovered later that she was a daughter of great horses, and a World's Grand Champion in her own right.

I would watch my friends, these beautiful horses, transform into fire-breathing creatures, as they entered the ring. They were a revelation as they racked and trotted with great speed and always in form. In my eyes, they were all beautiful.

And, after their classes, I walked with Cecil, as he hot-walked them. For one week, each year, I was in heaven with my friends, the American Saddlebreds.

After much groveling and begging, I finally convinced my father to allow me to take riding lessons, and, as I was deep in Hunter/Jumper country, and that meant learning to jump fences. I loved riding, I loved taking care of the horse, but jumping, which was introduced as soon as you could steer, was problematic. If you trotted to the fence, you might actually go over the fence with your horse, but, if you missed a stride at the canter, you were bound for an unpleasant experience. I decided I loved riding; but jumping, not so much.

When I was 13, an American Saddlebred stable had taken over Jim B.'s traditional stalls at Devon, and they were located an hour from my home, right in the middle of Pennsylvania's Amish Country, not far from the town of New Holland. I switched to Saddle Seat, taking riding lessons at that barn and soon after, my father purchased my first horse, a two year old filly named Summer's Vision. Vision, whose breeding was similar to Lover's Sensation, was no Lover's Sensation, but she was my champion. Vision, who began her career as a show pleasure horse, in later years learned to jump and to trail ride and took to anything that I asked of her, including clearing obstacles that other breeds flatly refused.

My parents arranged for me to spend the summer out at the farm, working around the horses, and with Vision. I did every job that was presented and, while exhausted, was wrapped up in the hustle and bustle that is a show barn in summer. At night, with the windows open during that hot Pennsylvania summer, I could hear the horse-drawn carriages coming down the road. From my bedroom, I could see the blinking lights on the buggy, and it took some time before that became just another part of the music of the place.

As my parents drove me to the barn for my daily dose of heaven, the route they took went right through the Amish country, on the roads on which they drove their buggies and carriages, and we passed dozens of horses in the course of a week. Day in and out, in all seasons, these horses served as transportation for the "plain folk" who owned them.