

One day, we followed a big chestnut pulling an open wagon. That horse's ears, which nearly touched, told us that he was a Saddlebred. And, when we also saw four white legs, we decided to follow him. The Amish driver, subsequently known to us as Jonas, eventually stopped, and I jumped out, and asked him about his horse. The gelding stood quietly while Jonas told me that he had acquired him at Tattersalls Summer Sale two weeks earlier, he was registered, and Jonas had his papers. Seeing my interest, and my mother's tolerant attitude, he offered to sell the gelding. We followed him the short way to his farm, and I pulled my cutback saddle out the trunk of the car. Jonas did not have a riding bridle, so I rode the big gelding out on a hill above the highway in his driving bridle. He was amazing, forward and powerful, and, as he had been started as a gaited horse; he offered to slow gait upon my awkward request. "My Kingstown" became the first horse we purchased off of "the road", and he was repatriated back to the show world. He was kind and generous, and tolerant enough that my father, who knew nothing about horses, was usually his groom on weekends.

At 14, I thus experienced, for the first time, how easy it was for a magnificent member of our beloved breed to slide from the lap of luxury to a world of pounding down the highway. And, that image of Ginger moved a bit further forward in my mind.

Over the next two years, whenever Jonas found a horse that he thought we would like, he called. And, our relationship grew, despite his being old order Amish and my family being "English." He grew to trust us and to introduce us, at least to some extent, to his world.

Fast forward a few years. I began a career in the horse world. I learned to ride hunters and jumpers, competed them, and taught others. But, regardless of the discipline, it was always Saddlebreds. I showed my American Saddlebred stallion, Destiny's Decision, who had begun his career as a Fine Harness horse, at Dressage at Devon, and in the Combination Class at Devon. We competed a wonderful gelding, Stolen Thunder, in the Young Hunter Division at Devon. And, wherever these horses went, people first commented on their beauty, and only thereafter asked what breed they were.

Then, in the mid-80's, I took over a dressage stable and retained the staff and clientele. And, I had found my niche- my American Saddlebreds, who had been a constant in my life, and dressage. While representatives of almost every other breed that is used in dressage were in my barn, I was blessed to also have American Saddlebreds to ride. These horses had what no other horse did- that amazing "can do" spirit. They also had the movement, combined with a suppleness that made them more comfortable for the rider and more capable of performing and excelling at the lateral and collected work required of them in that discipline.

The constants, during this time, were my trips to New Holland Sales Stables, and out through the Amish Country, to the same tack shops, where they did inexpensive and high quality repairs, and to various merchants who sold equipment needed to run a farm. There were always American Saddlebreds proudly pulling carriages, and farm wagons and courting buggies. And there were also American Saddlebreds at New Holland. I would go to the kill pen, where the horses who had been bought by the “meat men” would keep their horses, crawl through, and find one horse I could take home, work, and rehome. For years, this was a project that I devoted myself to, until I reached a point where I could no longer forget the faces of those horses I had left behind.

Finally, it was time to grow up, and I changed professions, going into New Homes, and purchased a small farm. Vision, then 22 and as sound as ever, moved with me, along with my Grand Prix dressage horse, Trendy, a Thoroughbred rescue I had named Ad Valorem, and my homebred stallion, Kohlinoor, a Thoroughbred cross.

One of my first plans for the new farm was to bring home another American Saddlebred, and so, I contacted the gentleman who had actually found Summer’s Vision for us. He was located in New Jersey at that time, and he had just gotten in a number of horses from the world renowned Crabtree Stables. Time had passed since I had been aware of the top bloodlines in the show world, but I knew what type I liked, and Love in Blue, a daughter of Callaway’s Blue Norther, fit the bill. The fact that she was in foal ended up being a bonus, and she had a gorgeous filly by the stallion New York State. I had raised both purebred and half-bred American Saddlebreds out of Vision, but it had been a long time since I’d had an adorable foal around. Aurora Blue would go on to be Reserve Champion at the 2007 Devon Horse Show, the only time she was ever shown.

I realized I wanted to put the things I loved most together; American Saddlebreds, Dressage, and re-homing, all together. I began to actively pursue American Saddlebreds in need, and work with like-minded people who saw the need to these horses to find high-quality long-term homes, and for these homes to be in keeping with what their conformation and abilities lent themselves to. It was a work in progress. Initially, a group of us were working through the internet bulletin board on Trot.org, raising fund, and bailing out horses from local brokers and kill buyers. At that time, no rescue formally dedicated to the breed existed. We were able to save dozens of horses, but without a safety net for them, it was a dicey business, and created substantial opportunity for liability for everyone involved. Also, the horses that we were re-homing were largely American Saddlebreds who had spent a long time on the road, and were in their early teens. I believed then as now that something needed to be done to stop the hemorrhaging of horses that was occurring. I needed to better understand exactly how it was happening, although the essential components were obvious.

At this time, I decided that I wanted to consider breeding Love in Blue to an American Saddlebred stallion, and that, while I knew what was available in Kentucky, I should check out the stallions that were in Pennsylvania. My intention was to find a stallion for the next Spring, as it was already Summer by this point. Now, of course I knew that almost all would be Amish owned, but that did not necessarily mean that they would all be unacceptable. I made a call to a farm where they were standing a big black grandson of a World Grand Champion gaited stallion. I left a message, as generally speaking, the Amish aren't waiting for calls in the shed where their phone is housed, and got a call back to stop by.

It was a humid July afternoon when I pulled down the drive. A few horses were out on one side of the long drive, and work mules populated the right side field. By the time I parked in front of the barn, a tall barefoot Amish woman came out the front door of the charming house, down the walk that ran through the manicured yard. We exchanged greetings, and I asked if I could see the stud. She walked into the barn, disappeared into the other side, and led him out- no shank- and still in her bare feet. He was a four year old stallion, in road shoes, and I admired her fortitude in exposing her bare feet to the possibility of getting under those shoes. He was not pretty headed, but he was very correct in his legs, and short backed.

When she walked him back to his stall, I stepped back into a row of tie stalls, and was distressed to see the hind leg of a horse in a stall with a huge gash across his hock. It looked like someone had taken a machete to the hock, and slashed it, leaving it with a wide open gash that peeled back to the fascia. It was awful and the swelling showed it was not new. When she came back around, I asked what had happened, and she explained that her husband had bought the horse at Tattersalls Summer Sale, and that when he was shipped home, he had stuck his leg through the side of the trailer, and it had caused this injury apparently as he pulled his leg back in. He was a lovely gelding, in great weight, with a big pretty eye. I was just sick. I thanked her for her time, and left.

I called a good friend, who was my partner in crime in all things horse, at that time. She informed me that I was a "bleeding heart" and that the horse was probably just fine. She did say she'd go with me. So, I called and made another appointment to see the stallion. When we got there, and the owner this time, went to go get the stallion, she slipped down the aisle, and looked at the gelding's leg. She came back out, face blanched, and whispered, "we need to go and get the horse trailer!" I said, "we do not own the horse." And then, the stallion was in front of us. I asked a bunch of questions about the horse, commented on his excellent condition, and then he was returned to his stall.

When the Amish man returned, I asked him about the gelding, and he told me the story. I asked what the Vet had said, and he told me that they had been told that it couldn't be sutured, and to put "some grease" on it, which was his

way of saying furacin. I said, "I am not a Vet, but I can help you fix that horse, if you will let me." He looked at me, and I explained what I would try, with bandaging. He looked at me, and said, "well, you can try."

For the next two and a half months, we went out, every other day, and changed the dressing. The wound granulated across, and healed. But what really grew was an interesting relationship. We always went out Saturday evening, because we couldn't go to the farm on Sunday. They were Old Order Amish, and true to their faith. So, Saturday evenings became quite an event. The entire family would be there- and there were eight children. We got to know them all- their personalities, their interests. And, I started to teach them riding lessons Saturday night. Eventually, we had "horse shows" where one of the older boys would climb on whatever horse they had been working with and do their very best imitation of Don Harris, bareback usually. It was fun and their humor was just incredible.

During the time that the gelding was healing, we discussed horses that were for sale on the farm, where they came from, and all things related to the American Saddlebreds, and their impact on the Amish world. While many Amish liked Standardbreds, this man liked "seeing that pair of ears" in front of him, pulling him the many miles. At that time, his wife's main driving horse was by Harlem Globetrotter. They had a mare by a son of five gaited World Grand Champion Attache that they were driving when she wasn't nursing a foal, or too pregnant to drive. I told him what we were looking for in sport horses, and, we started to do business. A lot of business. While he made it perfectly clear that he was looking for horses for "the people", he also didn't mind if I sold one for him for the same or better money, outside of the Amish world.

I started to photograph all of the horses that he got in that I thought might make sport horses. This meant teaching the boys how to stand the horses up correctly- not parked out- and bringing out a dressage bridle that made the horses look the part for potential buyers. It also meant being very careful with my photography. The boys hands could be in the picture, but nothing more- and especially not their faces. I posted the pictures of the horses on the internet, and made a deal with the Amish man- I'd get him a bit more money if he would hold onto a horse for 30 days.

People came from all over to buy. One woman drove overnight from North Carolina on a Friday night to look at a horse on Saturday morning. She bought him on the spot. He was a gorgeous black three year old named Virtuoso by the well-known sire, Periaptor. Another time, it was a lady from Virginia. She bought a seventeen- hand three year old from the legendary Callaway Hills Stables breeding program named Callaway's Capital Asset. Both geldings ended up competing as dressage horses with United States Dressage Federation show records. Another older gelding, named Chasing a Daydream went to a friend of mine who showed him to a second in the hunter class at the

Devon Horse Show, and he went on to event. One even went to a friend in Kentucky, who bought him sight unseen. He wasn't the most conventional choice for a dressage horse; Jumping Jack Flash had been the North Carolina State pleasure driving horse, but he had an amazing shoulder and came off his hocks like they were pistons. We determined later that he had become dangerous as a riding horse, offering to rear, and that was why they had shown him in harness. When I went to look at him, I had thrown one of the sons of the Amish man up on him bareback. He carried him kindly, and showed no indication of his former behavior. I realized that he simply could not raise up high enough under saddle for the show world- it was painful for him. However, he fit in to his new life beautifully and he won as a dressage horse for his new owner.

Another horse came from the Amish man's brother. "Gray" was a gorgeous big horse, very talented, and quite a character, and he had his papers with him. When we contacted the owner of record, he stated that he had already signed a transfer on the horse- to his trainer- when he purchased the horse. He would not sign another. He also didn't believe that the horse was standing in an Amish stable in PA, and not in Kentucky, where the trainer was. He remained unconvinced, and we could not get a transfer on the horse. It is incredibly frustrating to have variations on this theme, over and over again.

There was no ring at the Amish farm- we rode the horses on the nice level driveway. The wind on the hill was often blowing hard- laundry would be flipping in the wind- the windmill would be flying- and every kind of farm noise could be heard. If a horse would pack an amateur up and down the lane in this circus, they were bomb proof.

Sometimes, I would buy a horse from him, or get someone else to do so, and bring them home to work, especially if I knew they needed more work than they'd get standing at the Amish man's to get sold to a sport home, or if I knew I needed more than the 30 days. One such gelding, Final Destination, was by the royally bred sire Finally Attached, out of a Supreme Heir mare. He came to my farm skinny as hell, with a new and very expensive set of show shoes on him. He left with a new owner, and became a successful dressage horse in New England. It was grueling, stressful, and emotional. Eventually, I had to slow down, and then stop. Running out there several times a week, fielding all of the calls, and keeping the internet presence was taking a toll on everything else in my life.

Along about this time, I was also on the ASHA Sport Horse Committee. For about twenty minutes. Well, seriously, I had been writing articles for the ASHA magazine, on sport horse disciplines, and had been carrying on about the need to support the diversity of the breed, and the fact that nothing other than year end awards were being offered for sport horses, to the poor Secretary of the association for so long, she finally asked me who I thought should be the Chair

of the Committee. I recommended someone who had been doing sport horses within the breed, and who was a sport horse judge. It was a huge mistake.