

In one case, I found a fabulous gaited horse at an Amish farm. I asked one of the Amish kids to ride him for me, and he climbed up bareback, with a snaffle bridle, and rode the horse out into the corn field, which had just been plowed. He trotted the horse back and forth for me. I asked him to slow gait the horse, and said he didn't know how, so I explained it to him. He raised the horse up, and shook his head, and the horse stepped right off into an unreal slow gait- especially in road shoes, and working through the depth of dirt in the field.

When he got off the horse, we talked to his Dad about where the horse had come from. He had been purchased from one of the usual suspects- a group of "trainers" who act as brokers, and sell horses from the show barns to the Amish. I called him, and asked about the papers. He informed me that I couldn't have them- at any price. The person he got the horse from sold him a lot of horses, all great quality, and never with their papers. This one wasn't "Louisville quality", so he had no value to them. That was just the deal. No amount of pleading would budge him. It made me sick. To think that because of someone's vanity, the fact that this horse wasn't going to be what they wanted in their world, would allow this gorgeous animal to be denied his identity and heritage was, then as now, disgusting.

These horses weren't just falling through the cracks. Places like William Woods University were revolving doors for horses. Well-meaning people would donate a horse, and the horse would disappear within weeks, bought by a broker. Or, trainers who knew that they couldn't get the customer's money out of a horse would suggest donating, which was functional as long as the tax aspect worked out. The problem was that many times, the horses weren't retained by the programs long enough to qualify, but then, who was checking? Other horses would be at a show one week, and on the road the next. Callaway's Apple Jack, sans his gorgeous tail that dragged three feet on the ground, was sixth at the New York Breeder's Show one week, and standing in front of me at an Amish farm the next. If they don't win, or fit the program, the Amish offering cash money to the brokers has been the end of thousands of American Saddlebred show horses. And in Apple Jack's case, his beautiful tail was worth more than the living creature who had produced it.

A horse named Callaway's Blizzard was donated to William Woods. One of the girls in the family who had donated him wasn't aware of the donation until it was too late, and Blizzard was no longer at William Woods. She posted on the internet, asking if anyone knew where he might be, as he had, of course, not been transferred out of William Woods name, but was not at the school. Knowing which broker did business with WW, I started checking around my area. I found out who had originally bought him, and went to that farm, only to find that Amish man had sold him to another. I had the name, but no address, so, after asking around, I was able to find out where the horse was. I showed up at the farm, and knocked on the door, and asked if they still had the horse. They did.

The owner was kind enough to take me to the barn, and show me Blizzard. I took some pictures of him with my cell phone, and asked if he might be for sale. Realizing that he had an opportunity, the owner quoted me 5K for the horse. He said that the horse was doing 30-40m miles trips. The gelding was in rough shape. Now when I say this, I've had decades of seeing Amish horses on the road, and knowing when one is really fit, and knowing when one is really poor. If he was doing those long trips, he was doing it on sheer heart- a hallmark of the breed. This guy wasn't right. I left after saying that I'd stop back, if there was any interest.

In the meantime, I sent the pictures to the former owner, and she confirmed that it was "her Blizzard". I told her about the price, which was more than she could afford. I also said that I'd go back and try again. Several months later, in the Summer, I stopped back. The Amish man came to the door, and said he didn't have the horse any more. I asked if he'd sold him. He paused, and then said, "No. He up and died on me. Just like that. Dead." Knowing the condition that Blizzard had been in, I was sure that it had been more serious than I had even thought. But, he wasn't sick, and pounding down the roads, any more.

The sales were no better. If you were selling a gelding, 16 hands or better, no younger than 3, and no older than 10, and it went for under 5K, chances were excellent that that horse was on a truck to Pennsylvania. Not that there weren't other outlets; there are Amish communities in Kentucky, Wisconsin and more. However, Pennsylvania has both the Amish brokers, buying horses directly from English trainers/brokers, as well as through sales like Tattersalls, Superior, and now Robertson's, and sales like Mel Hoovers, and New Holland, that cater to the Amish, and are where the Kill Buyers fill their trucks. Both Mel's and New Holland also have "higher class" sales, where quality driving prospects, fresh from training barns, generally bring higher prices. I have spent far too much time on the internet, looking at the transfers that were added to the ASHA data base, and referencing the sales catalogs. The usual brokers, which included Amish, like Jonas Z. Nolt (deceased) who had the late Leon Richardson buying horses for him for many years, and Christ Stoltzfus, would have the horses in their names. The problem is, they never left their names. They were just lost into the world of pounding out life on the road.

The Amish have their own market jargon. "Fresh horse" means just out of a show barn. "Boys horse" is one who is flashy, and forward. Just as teenage boys like their sports cars, the young Amish men, looking for a bride, enjoy a bit of flash on their horses. "Family horses" are usually larger, and quiet, and suited to pulling the carriages with the entire family inside. "Acclimated" means that they have been out on the road a bit, and "sticky starter" means that they do not like to move forward from stop signs. Other comments like "looks at trucks", "up headed", "traffic safe", "finger-tip control", "women can drive", "speaks for himself", "keen trotter", "one of a kind", "plum the kind", "boy's horse deluxe", "a real powerhouse", "mile eating trot", "fills two hands" "too

much horse for my wife”, “restless at stop signs”, are self-explanatory. “Ready for miles”, means that they have been on the road, and are fit. Miles are just miles, and if a horse cannot do a minimum of a 30 mile round trip, once fit, they generally do not make the cut.

At the same sale we attended to buy “Delta”, and some others, an adorable chestnut gelding named “He’s Some Kinda Wonderful” was catalogued. We spent time meeting him, and he was a big gelding; affectionate and sweet. He was also another one who had suffered the indignity of having his tail cut off, prior to being sold to the broker who owned him. Unfortunately, we needed to buy Delta and the others with the fund we had, and the gelding was one of the first through the sale. We were broken hearted to see him go.

One year later, there he was, listed in Mel’s catalog sale; “Seven year old 16 hand chestnut Saddlebred gelding, sound & powerful, on the road one year, good broke carriage horse, single or double, ready for some miles, been on 60 & 80 mile weekend trips last winter, might watch some traffic if not driven enough, has papers!” He was bred to be a futurity colt, but he wound up on the road. Needless to say, we did not let him down again. Now, “Harry” is a lovely event horse for his owner.

The real issue is that what will win in the top level of the show ring, which is the only place left where the professionals who can succeed in that rare air actually make a living, is an anomaly. A horse with a “vertical neckset”, and the horse also has to “turn at the poll”, or they can have breathing problems, trying to hold the show ring headset, as an example. Not what the breed defaults back to at least 80% of the time, which are horses who are called either “forward headed” or “straight necked”. And for the horses have that physically defining feature, you pick the division. For the rest, the trainers should be in the situation of trying to maximize the benefit to the breeder, while they are also trying make a living. The breeders whose colts will not make the show ring are faced with trying to find a way to recoup their investment, and take care of their colt. The majority seem to be those who will simply wash their hands of the horses that don’t make the cut. I had a trainer tell me that if a colt didn’t make it, after he had put his time and effort in him, he “didn’t care what happened to them,” as though it was something that the horse was actually trying to do- not be what the trainer wanted. But then, I had a breeder tell me that he thinks that when they try to make a horse do what they can’t, “we just make them mad.” This doesn’t end well- for the horse.

Well, when you combine a horse who is bred to be game and intelligent, and you ask them to do what they physically cannot do, most times, they’ll try, and then, when they hurt, they’ll have to stop trying. I cannot count the times I’ve heard trainers discuss the idea that a horse simply needed their hocks or stifles injected, or another treatment that might help them to do what their body simply was not built to do. When a horse is especially well bred, the efforts made to bring them to the potential that was hoped for can be even

more heroic. But then too, so is the devastation at the moment of realization that no amount of artificial support is going to change what nature has given. However, this doesn't mean that same horse cannot be someone's "champion" in alternative disciplines.

Moreover, the horses that I fell in love all of those years ago could not win in today's show ring. And not just at the World Championship level. I have spoken with professionals who were also breed judges, at the highest level, and they confirmed this. Today's judges do not value the speed at the rack and trot, and the "jump out of their skin gameness" as much as they value that one rare thing- a vertical neckset. Of course, they must also have the requisite ability to turn over at the poll, and still breathe. I was amazed at just how many show horses had wind surgery, just to try and have them conform to the requirement. The old pictures of the top Fine Harness horses, with their noses out front of them exemplify the difference. And, once again, as the judges in the ring are also the trainers, they have the ability to dictate exactly what has value, and what does not.

The reality is that the majority of horses who do not fit the show ring paradigm are built beautifully to be sport horses. As with European Warmbloods, uphill, with withers higher than croup, nice throatlatches, broad chests and straight legs, and the impulsion to come from behind with power. They are almost always naturally athletic, and jump like stags.

When I worked in Real Estate Development, when we subdivided a piece of ground, each lot was valued equally, as the costs, initially, were the same. Some could be more expensive to actually build out, but to bring them to a point of being able to be available to the market the costs were the same. Then, you had some homesites that were more valuable; they had great views, or wonderful trees, or sat on a cul de sac. These were premium, and you could add more to the value. Then you had lots that also would accommodate the bigger houses, which were more expensive to build, but also brought higher prices. Then, there were those homesites where you would build a "spec" home; one where you were gambling that investing the funds to put a house on the lot would help it sell. Just as with horses, it costs a certain amount to get them to the point where you can market them, even if you can sell them as foals. Then, you have the ones who aren't really valuable until they wear leather. Of course, you have some who will bring the best prices when they are shown, and thus those expenses are incurred. Finally, you have the horses who you just need to try and get your expenses out of, to break even, and keep going.

More than ever, we need a marketing system in our breed that find a high quality long term home for every single horse that we raise. More than ever, we cannot afford to have any horses falling through the cracks- deliberately, or not. We raise horses that are meant to be sound and useful into their 20's, and yet, they are used up and at risk of slaughter in their teens, here in Pennsylvania, and across the country. I would be profoundly shocked to find

that most breeders aspire to raise a horse bound for the road, but that is exactly what is happening, and has been happening, for decades. We have been hemorrhaging horses to the Amish. Providing the Amish with an ongoing source of driving horses has been going on for decades. It isn't good for those horses, and it hasn't been good for the breed. With the amount of Tourism Revenue brought into Pennsylvania by the Amish Country, welfare oversight is nominal in most cases, and the Veterinarians who work in the Amish country seem to become more desensitized to the issues.

While show horses aren't subjected to the hours of being checked up high that Ginger spoke up, for a horse who cannot do it, minutes can seem like hours. The fulcrum effect of the pressure exerted on a horse's sacral region is incredibly similar to a person with sciatica. The pain is excruciating. It isn't a wonder horses rebel, and leather goes flying. It doesn't have to happen. The same horse can make someone a brilliant competitor in the alternative disciplines. But we need to build the bridges that afford them those opportunities. We are standing on a precipice, and we are responsible for the future of the oldest breed registry in the United States. If we do not act to support the diversity of the breed, we have only ourselves to blame, as the breed dies out. And, of course, as it does, there will be more stories like that of Ginger.

"One day, while our cab and many others were waiting outside one of the parks where music was playing, a shabby old cab drove up beside ours. The horse was an old worn-out chestnut, with an ill-kept coat, and bones that showed plainly through it, the knees knuckled over, and the fore-legs were very unsteady. I had been eating some hay, and the wind rolled a little lock of it that way, and the poor creature put out her long thin neck and picked it up, and then turned and looked about for more. There was a hopeless look in the dull eye that I could not help noticing, and then, as I was thinking where I had seen that horse before, she looked full at me and said, "Black Beauty, is that you?"

It was Ginger! but how changed! The beautifully arched and glossy neck was now straight, and lank, and fallen in; the clean straight legs and delicate fetlocks were swelled; the joints were grown out of shape with hard work; the face, that was once so full of spirit and life, was now full of suffering, and I could tell by the heaving of her sides, and her frequent cough, how bad her breath was.

Our drivers were standing together a little way off, so I sidled up to her a step or two, that we might have a little quiet talk. It was a sad tale that she had to tell.

After a twelvemonth's run off at Earlshall, she was considered to be fit for work again, and was sold to a gentleman. For a little while she got on very well, but after a longer gallop than usual the old strain returned, and after being rested and doctored she was again sold. In this way she changed hands several times, but always getting lower down.

"And so at last," said she, "I was bought by a man who keeps a number of cabs and horses, and lets them out. You look well off, and I am glad of it, but I could not tell you what my life has been. When they found out my weakness they said I was not worth what they gave for me, and that I must go into one of the low cabs, and just be used up; that is what they are doing, whipping and working with never one thought of what I suffer -- they paid for me, and must get it out of me, they say. The man who hires me now pays a deal of money to the owner every day, and so he has to get it out of me too; and so it's all the week round and round, with never a Sunday rest."

I said, "You used to stand up for yourself if you were ill-used."

"Ah!" she said, "I did once, but it's no use; men are strongest, and if they are cruel and have no feeling, there is nothing that we can do, but just bear it -- bear it on and on to the end. I wish the end was come, I wish I was dead. I have seen dead horses, and I am sure they do not suffer pain; I wish I may drop down dead at my work, and not be sent off to the knackers."

I was very much troubled, and I put my nose up to hers, but I could say nothing to comfort her. I think she was pleased to see me, for she said, "You are the only friend I ever had."

Just then her driver came up, and with a tug at her mouth backed her out of the line and drove off, leaving me very sad indeed.

A short time after this a cart with a dead horse in it passed our cab-stand. The head hung out of the cart-tail, the lifeless tongue was slowly dropping with blood; and the sunken eyes! but I can't speak of them, the sight was too dreadful. It was a chestnut horse with a long, thin neck. I saw a white streak down the forehead. I believe it was Ginger; I hoped it was, for then her troubles would be over. Oh! if men were more merciful they would shoot us before we came to such misery."

All of the information in this piece is factual, and true. In the event that you desire further information about anything contained in the article, please feel free to email me at bryndewinesfarm@aol.com