

# Barn Anthropologist

By Bob Goddard, Equine Humorist

Spring is a very special time of year in my home state of Michigan, The Land of Perpetual Overcast. There is nothing like that first warm day when citizens across The Great Hand emerge from their hovels, greet one another through blinking eyes, and look skyward. Then they panic.

"Oh my gosh! What's that big yellow thing in the sky?"

"I don't know! Is it an evil omen?"

"I think it's dangerous! Run for your lives! Get back inside!"

As for me, that first hint of spring puts me in the mood to do something wild and risky – like visiting the barn where my daughters board their horses. If I can remember how to get there. I sort of stay away from the place during the long, cold winter months.

Don't get the wrong idea. I enjoy going out to the barn. I like all barns, really. They're like big tree forts in the backyard, only they're on the ground and have horses.

There is something agreeable about a well-maintained horse barn. I enjoy things like the aroma of fresh pine shavings and that creaky-smooth sound leather makes and the clip-clop of horses being led back and forth. And – don't let this get out – I think I may be a wee bit addicted to citronella. Are there any on-line support groups for this? I mean, before it's too late?

What I don't like at the girls' barn – or any barn – is all the work. Actually, I don't mind the work itself. I think the work is great. I just don't like *doing* the work. I would rather watch. Just sort of hang out and listen to people and take notes. I'm more of a "barn watcher" than an actual participant. My job is to observe Barn Life in its natural state and then report back. A Barn Anthropologist, if you will.

While the Barbra J. King approach (Barbra J. King was the famous anthropologist who lived with apes and lived to tell the world) is big fun, there is a problem. I have no place to sit. This is especially a problem in the spring when everything is so wet. Horse barns are notorious for poor seating.



As a Barn Anthropologist, I pay particular attention to a phenomenon known as *mucking banter*. For you non-scientists, *mucking banter* refers to those wonderful conversations between horsepeople while they clean out stalls. It is very similar to the conversations office workers have over their cubicles. There is something amusing and moderately revealing about communication between disembodied voices.

It was during my springtime visit while eavesdropping on a hearty

round of *mucking banter* that I first heard the term "stool watcher." Hmm... Stool Watcher. Interesting. It sounded a lot like a sitting job to me. Should I volunteer? Could I be a Barn Anthropologist *and* a Stool Watcher? I investigated.

There is a problem with anthropological investigations. If you start asking questions, you might not like the answers. Of course, I didn't receive an actual answer. Unless you count a chorus of ridicule laced with bizarre suggestions as an answer. And then there was that Deadly Stare from my daughter. I bet Barbra J. King's bi-peds were better behaved than this group.

Later, my old buddy and primary source of reliable information, Google, gave me my answer. Apparently, "stool watching" is indeed of particular concern in the spring. It's a time-honored method



of keeping track of the effects of seasonal dietary changes. That is, horses eat more fresh grass in the warmer weather and *somebody* has keep on eye on whether or not the sudden switch is irritating their bowels. It is not a seating issue. Who was to know?

During my following visit, the *mucking banter* revolved around another springtime issue: mares in heat. I did not investigate.

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