



- photo by Mary Lou Lawless -

For Love and Money

- A Night at the Races -

By Sherri Geistkemper

I'm obsessed with horse racing. I plot my trip to the Kentucky Derby every year with dreams of a Mint Julep in my hand, a fantastically ridiculous hat on my head, and bluegrass-fed thoroughbreds in my vision. I've never made it yet, but someday I will.

For me though, it doesn't matter what kind of a race it is: Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, quarter horses...I'd probably even drive to see a mule race. My obsession with live horse racing in general was fueled many years ago when an old man they called "Derby" befriended me.

My step mom says I met Derby because he was a long time neighbor of hers in What Cheer, Iowa. Frankly I was so young I really have no idea how Derby and I became friends. I can tell you the *why* though - our mutual love of horses.

Derby and I used to pass a summer afternoon betting a dollar a race on the trotters and pacers at the What Cheer County Fairgrounds. When I met Derby I

knew nothing about gambling or horse racing. With a nudge and a wink he said, "I'll let you in on a few of my secrets." And he did.

Soon Derby had introduced me to several of the jockeys, and more importantly their horses. He showed me the difference between a trotter and a pacer and taught me a little about tack. More importantly he coached, "Look for one you like, then bet on that one. I'm sure you'll win." (Apparently I was a natural because I don't recall ever losing to my friend, Derby)

It's been over twenty years since I sat in the grandstands with Derby, but my love of horses and betting still flourishes. It's also been a great way to get my non-horse friends to do a horse activity with me. Recently I called up my friend Melissa in Waukee and set up a date to go to Prairie Meadows. Melissa and her husband, Brian, agreed to go but admitted they didn't know anything about betting on horses. "I'll let you in on a few of my secrets," I assured her.

"First get a program," I started. "Then read

the horses' names and see if you like any of them. **IGNOR ALL THE STATISTICS!** Wait for the parade before the race and see if you like the horse and the name, then bet \$2 on every horse you like. You'll win for sure."

My husband, Doug, of course, piped up saying the exact opposite. He suggested ignoring the names and reading only the statistics. He said to wait for a "crazy" looking horse with good statistics and bet on that one. (For the record, folks, my earnings far exceed his but bet however you will...)

Before the night was over Brian and Melissa had made up their own methods of picking a winner. All said and done, the night of gambling cost each couple a total of about \$26.

During our four-hour stint at the track we caught up on lost time, made plans for the future, and debated many problems in



- photo by Sherri Geistkemper -

other people's lives and works. We laughed until our guts ached and enjoyed a beautiful summer night in Iowa. That's the beauty of live horse racing - time, relaxation and horses!

I'm eager to take my daughters to the races too. Sofie made it to see the trotter and pacer races at the Jones County Fair this year and pointed at the horses as they flew by. Unfortunately right now a straw and a pop are a little more exciting than live racing. Someday I'll let her and her little sister in on a few of my betting secrets...

Prairie Meadows is definitely a place we'll also go because they accommodate families with their outdoor park area. Food, pop, beer, horses and gambling all cater a little "something for everyone" in your herd. It's a family fun night that by far exceeds any fun promised in the chaotic lands of mice and pizza. (So maybe the idea of beer and gambling doesn't sound like much of a "family" activity - but I assure you, it can be.)

My dream is to spend one of my birthdays at the Kentucky Derby, but until then I'm more than content with the many racing venues in Iowa. Obviously I don't bet on live racing for the money, that's just part of the fun. I watch racing for the love of horses. My husband, of course, will tell you the exact opposite - he's in it for the money. But Derby and I know who's really ahead.

