

Confidential Interview #4

Host: OK, caller. Thank you again for calling in. And maybe the way we can start is if you could give me an idea of what the nature of your experiences are.

Caller: Ahh, world champion horse trainer. Retired farrier. Enthusiast of the Tennessee walking horse since the era of Go Boy's Shadow.

Host: I'm sorry...the era of what?

Caller: ...meaning walking horses since those days...54, 55, along through there.

Host: OK.

Caller: I have the same agenda that you all have. It is about, ah, being reasonably discreet in the information, but not discreet about the desire for the industry to be cleaned up.

Host: OK.

Caller: Does that make sense?

Host: I think so. And let's just talk and you know, you are free to tell me whatever you feel comfortable discussing with me. If there are things you don't want to discuss, obviously you don't have to.

Caller: Let's just go for it.

Host: OK. Let's start with this. Based on your experience, do you have information or views to how common the practice is today?

Caller: Well, I think in general, giving the walking horse trainers a little bit of justice, they are making an effort to abide by the rules, and they are making a reasonable effort to clean up. It just doesn't appear to be enough. I think they're just trying to stay just one feather ahead, you know, instead of going ahead and cleaning it up and getting it to be...history, so to speak, just, just, they just...The opinion that I get and the things that I hear and I talk to people about, they're only gonna go as far as they're pushed to go. Does that make sense?

Host: Yes. And I was going to ask a little bit more about that. There certainly has been some discussion—and some of it's public, some of it's private—that while the soring practices that existed long ago generally are no longer being used, that there is still some degree of practices that result in pain to the horse that are just sort of right at the margin, right close enough where a, a, an owner or trainer or exhibitor thinks that they can manipulate or improve the performance of the horse using soring techniques, but not so much that the horse is going to be turned down at a show. Is that sort of what you're sayin' to me?

Caller: Yes, sir. I think, I think, I think they're tryin' to be on the borderline of what...well, now...and I really believe there are a few horses out there that are talented enough to, to not be in violation and then

there are horses that come under the heading of counterfeit and you've got to violate the law to get 'em to perform.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: But the soring practices of today from the use of oil of mustard and croton oil and the pressure shoeing, have just converted a little bit and the style of using it has changed, and some of the horses are not needing near as much of it. And some of the horses are learning to live sore so that there's not a real change. So you're not being sound during the week and soring them the show week. You keep them down to a certain level, they almost become intolerant to the checking of the pain. Does that make sense?

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: Alright. And part of the theory right now is to, is to keep the horses at a certain level of soring to the, so the horse gets...if you palpate their feet and act like the government three times a day, they're gonna get to the point where it doesn't matter what you do to 'em until they start hittin' that hard ground and start to walkin'.

Host: OK. I think you said something like these practices have sort of been combined in a way designed to put the horse, I think you said, in a situation where it learns to live sore. Can you describe a little bit about how these techniques are used now?

Caller: ...If you're gonna teach a horse to flat walk, it makes sense that you cannot go in there and put pressure on the bottom of his foot on a regular basis. But if you were to use a mixture of kerosene or different products that kerosene, that work as kerosene, and oil of mustard and DMSO, and you mix certain paints, and we call 'em leg paints, you know, we mix certain paints up to a certain sprint, one horse would only need a Grade 1 and another horse may be so tolerant to pain he needs a Grade 4. So each, each little area would be different measurements of sprint, of ability to penetrate and sore. So you would like work the horse in those during the week, and keepin' his feet clean and not using the chains so much as abusive as they used to be, and then get closer to the horse show and then just like sand the bottom of their feet or put some pressure under the bottom of their feet. And what you're technically doing is inducing a little bit of laminitis or...in, in...but these horses can get to the point where you can shoe them flat footed and they can have just enough sole pressure that they walk around normal until they go to hittin' the ground. And then by trimmin' all of the heels off of the horse and having the horse very flat footed and sitting on the pads where the heel buds are practically touching the pads and the toe is 4 inches long or whatever, you're looking at that depth there but when you really think of the depth from the coronet band down through the frog, that depth is very thin.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And that's where they're creating the soreness that's difficult to read.

Host: Uh huh. OK.

Caller: Do you get the idea of you keep the horse sort of fixed during the week to teach him to walk, and then you sorta like kill that to go to the horse show and add the pressure shoeing for the weekend?

And, and...what you're doin' is, and a hypothetical situation would be sore the horse pretty hard on Monday, alright? And then sort of sounding up by Thursday, and then on Friday you sting him a little bit and then you, you know, he's still, he's still deep walkin' from the, from the exterior chemicals, he's still deep walking from that, but he's sounding up enough that you add a little swing face to it. And then from there you just square him up a little bit, and it gets to the point to where it's just a very minor amount that it takes, you know?

Host: Uh huh. OK.

Caller: Now this is horses with pads on, OK? We're talkin'...we're talking padded horses.

Host: Right. Ah...

Host: Well, as I understand what you told me a little bit earlier, the, the pain involved with the pad, as you said, doesn't come from the pad itself but the way the horse's hoof is trimmed...

Caller: Sure.

Host: ...so that there's not enough horse wall, rather hoof wall, left at the back of the hoof near where the bulbs of the heel are to give that area protection so that it starts to cause inflammation and pain in the lamina back there. Is that accurate?

Caller: Exactly. And what you do is, is that through the process of this, some of the foot intentionally loses integrity. So therefore, around the coffin bone you have the circumflex artery and the circumflex nerve.

Caller: OK. Now, think about this...if you have a horse that you have worked on until you've sort of eliminated some of the integrity in the hoof capsule itself, that horse can stand around and it actually doesn't hurt. And he can actually walk around, but when he starts pounding that ground then it's almost, that vibration up through the circumflex nerve because integrity weakens a little bit and causes a flexation in the hoof up against the nerve...the sole, I should say, the flexation of the sole up against the nerve and, and this is probably things that ya'll already know, but it's a simple, a simple example of these horses do not have to stand around in a knot with all four feet in a 5-gallon bucket lid like they used to in the '60s and '70s, you know. They've got it to the scientific point now to where you can almost do it and put that horse on a specific time that he'll start to sore up, you know.

Host: Right. Could you speak to that question, as to whether or not there are, for example, other techniques being used to try to defeat the inspection process?

Caller: Well, there are obviously killing agents that they're putting on the horses to stop, you know, the sensitivity side of it, you know. And that's been...started out, the original product that was on the market was mineral ice.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: Start it back then, you know. Then you can take xylicane and mix it in a spray bottle and they called it Hurricane, you know. And go on down the line,

So there is no uniform pattern of what they should do. And I think both sides should be addressed. I think some uniformity in how they inspect the horses and some clarity in, in the punishment if you're caught, you know. I personally feel like that, that anyone caught with a horse sore in two feet should be a felony.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And from a felony, should be a, a conviction. And from that conviction, the horse owner and the horse trainer should be equally prosecuted. And the reason being is, the reason being is most of these horse trainers don't have an ounce of education, you know. There's one or two of 'em that do. There's two or three great businessmen in there.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: But most of these boys don't have very much goin' for 'em. They learned, they grew up ridin' horses to make enough money to go to, you know, to go to the store, and they sorta worked their way up. And the pressure on them is coming from the owners. This is not, this is not a self-inflicted kind of thing. This is a pressure of survival.

Host: Uh huh. In order to stay in business as a trainer, they've gotta produce winners.

Caller: If a walkin' horse trainer cheats and commits fraud, ah, commits a felony, he should go to prison for it. But he should be given, you know, ah, a typical standard that says that if you do this beyond this point, you're gone.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And the only way to stop it is for the owner to have the same penalty. If you take someone like one of the master owners of the horses that are big into it and own all the other corporations and stuff, you let him look at 5 years prison time for having a horse trainer that has committed an act against a horse, it stops right then.

Host: Yeah. There's certainly been a lot of discussion about the extent to which an owner should be penalized...

Caller: Equally. Equally. It should be equal.

Host: One of the arguments that comes on behalf of the owners is that, you know, the owners don't really know what the trainers are doing and therefore shouldn't be responsible for something that the trainer does.

Caller: That's BS. That's BS. That's absolute BS. Now there's...

Host: OK.

Caller: That's the most ludicrous statement that anybody on either side could make. They know what's goin' on. They purchase the horses. They ask the same questions. How much will this horse carry? Will he go through inspection?

Host: Uh huh.

Host: Yeah.

Caller: So there's a, you know, so what I'm saying is, if you're gonna clean it up before something happens that it gets, that something changes is the owner has to share equal responsibility. And as long as that owner can stand out there and, and I was a trainer, I know what they go through, I know what trainers go through from the owners.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And believe you me, it's no fun to have a mortgage payment and a family and somebody pulls up and gets six horses from you and cuts that salary because you're scared to sore them to go to the horse show that weekend.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And they move 'em to somebody else who's not scared. And then that trainer ends up 3 months later gettin' on suspension, you know, and you've never been on suspension. And so, ah, you're fighting a battle there that is very winnable, you know, but the guilt has got to be shared out. And I'm givin' you that advice because I believe it from the bottom of my hand. I'm not defending owners or defending Tennessee walking horse trainers. I'm defending Tennessee walking horses.

Host: Right. Right.

Caller: And they're goin', they're going at this in the way that it's gonna take 400 decades to stop it because they're too many young horse trainers coming on and too many horses out there and too much money in the industry. Ah, if they would get a consistency and say if your horse comes up here and this is the tolerance, right here.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: Anything over this, you're goin' to jail. These horses are going to clean up.

Caller: I think it's correct. I think it's the correct question, and I think that I gave you an alternative. I would be, I would be glad to go and analyze, privately unannounced and unknown, and come back to you with a report as show season starts, you know, a couple of shows into the show season.

Host: Uh huh, yeah.

Caller: And give you an unbiased report on what I saw, as I've given you unbiased information this morning, you know.

Host: Got it. Yeah. OK.

Caller: You know, it's people...the publicity is so bad that people assume that everybody with a Tennessee walkin' horse has committed some kind of crime. And that's my agenda in getting this stopped and getting this turned around.

Host: Ah, I understand what you're sayin'. Sure. OK, well, we've talked about a wide range of topics today and I think your information has been, you know, extraordinarily detailed and very informative. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to communicate?

Caller: No, ah, my whole goal in this is I would just like this industry cleaned up. And I would like it to where the act of, and enjoy watching a Tennessee walking horse horse show, and because the horses are clean and because the horses have a good reputation now, that I wouldn't be criticized for being...I can't go, with my level of what I do, I can't go enjoy watching a horse show because it is such a bad image for the horses that I try to cure.

Host: Uh huh.

Caller: And so it really puts me in a position to where actually enjoying watching horses perform, ah, is something that I can't do. And if the image were cleaned up and if the industry were cleaned up and all was well, I could deeply enjoy more of, of it, you know. I do not, by the same token, care about goin' and watchin' a bunch of sore horses either.

Host: Thank you very much again.

Caller: You bet. Appreciate it.