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Shane Mc Gowan (1957-2023)

*Got on a lucky one
Came in eighteen to one
I've got a feeling
This year's for me and you*

- **Fairy Tale of New York**

Shane McGowan & The Pogues

The story is that the acronym G.O.A.T, now driven into banality, was the invention of Lonnie Ali in 1992. She fashioned the initials signifying “Greatest of All Time” from her husband’s oft repeated self-description: “I am the greatest.”

Yolanda Williams married Muhammad Ali in 1986 and was his wife, business manager, and caretaker from that point until his passing in 2016. She fulfilled all three roles with grace, efficiency, and affection.

G.O.A.T debates are a perpetual life-force in the world of sports and no less so in our game, thoroughbred racing. The hardened handicapper or track urchin can summon arcane statistics and lore to support many of the greats: Man O’ War, Seabiscuit, Citation, Seattle Slew, etc. But to the casual fan and the once-a-year race watcher, there is near unanimity on the G.O.A.T. thoroughbred: Secretariat.

Over the more than four decades that have passed since our first Derby screed, there has scarce been a year that a friend has not asked me when there would be a Secretariat themed letter. My answer was always that like the Civil War or the JFK assassination, there was nothing of value that I could add. That is still true. But as the ranks of real time observers of the Secretariat phenomenon fade daily, I decided to give my version of some lesser-known aspects of Big Red’s time with us.

Notwithstanding the worshipful place that he holds in my heart, I never bet on Secretariat. His odds were always prohibitive. He started favorite in all but one of his twenty-one starts and was odds-on in seventeen of them.

His record was not flawless. He finished fourth in his first start due to a combination of racing mishap and rider error. After a dominant score in the Champagne Stakes, the stewards rendered a highly questionable interference call and placed him second. His dominance resumed with four consecutive stakes wins leading into his final Derby prep, the Wood Memorial.

At that time, my Derby horse was Sham who was coming to the Wood three weeks after equaling the stakes record in the Santa Anita Derby. Pancho Martin trained, Laffit Pincay rode, and I liked my chances.

Secretariat’s stable mate, Angle Light, won the Wood, leading gate to wire, with Sham second, and Secretariat a dull third. This boosted the bravado of the backbench doubters who cited the distance limitations of Secretariat’s sire, Bold Ruler. They overlooked the fact that Secretariat and Sham shared a damsire in one of the most celebrated stamina influences ever: Princequillo.

Subsequently a story surfaced that, prior to the Wood, Secretariat had suffered from a painful tooth abscess, the existence of which was not revealed to the betting public or even to his rider. The backbench suddenly grew silent and the Angle Light/Secretariat entry of 1 and 1a was installed as even money favorite for the 99th running of the Kentucky Derby.

While Sham established the lead turning for home, Secretariat burst forward from eleventh to sixth and, after a subsequent brief engagement with the leader, swept to the front.

Announcer “Chic” Anderson, whose epochal call in the Belmont five weeks hence became as quotable as a Bible verse, stated simply “On the wire it’s gonna be Secretariat, he wins it by two lengths.” The winner’s time of 1:59.40 established a new and still unequalled record for the race and the distance. Analytics have now established that Sham ran the second fastest Derby ever though Monarchos (’01) maintains claim to the second fastest winning time.



GROOM EDDIE SWEAT- SECRETARIAT-JOCKEY RON TURCOTTE UP

(KENTUCKY DERBY 1973)

The trainer of the third-place finisher, Our Native, was a friend of mine and one of the most unforgettable racing characters that I ever came to know. Bill Resseguet learned the game from his father, Milton, who schooled him from childhood at the Fair Grounds.

Much like Hamlet’s description of Yorick to Horatio, Bill was a fellow “of infinite jest and excellent fancy.” He quickly went from claimers to the upper levels of the game and was only thirty-three when he saddled Our Native in the Derby. His owner-clients included MLB great, Dick Allen, and Louisiana football legend, Billy Cannon.



DICK ALLEN



BILL RESSEGUET



BILLY CANNON

The trainer's rakish demeanor scored with the press and the fans. But Bill did not like rules, and it cost him. His earliest misdemeanors involved petty theft from LoCoco's Fairway Grocery adjacent to the Fair Grounds. By the mid 1970's, the Illinois Horse Racing Board disinvented him from competing there after an investigation into suspected race fixing and his betting pattern in winning trifectas.

In 1981 he lost his Louisiana license after a plea bargain involving attempted bribery of a lab technician following a positive drug test on a Resseguet trained horse. In 1987, after a pardon from then Gov. Edwin Edwards, the Racing Commission restored his license.

A particularly bizarre episode involved the doyen of Spendthrift Farm, Brownell Combs. The two were in a disputatious confrontation in Combs' office over a financial matter. Combs left the room briefly and when he returned, Bill was gone. Also gone was Combs' prized bronze Eclipse Award for his 1975 three-year old champion, Wajima. Police recovered the figure from Bill's hotel room.

Bill was a skillful chef and liked to put on spreads after polo matches at our farm. In 1983 he invited Jennifer and me to his place for a small dinner party mostly for several of his owners, including Billy Cannon, who was a practicing orthodontist after retiring from the NFL. He was a well-schooled horseman as well.

A few weeks following that dinner, most Louisianians, including me, were gob smacked by Dr. Cannon's arrest in Baton Rouge for attempting to pass a counterfeit hundred-dollar bill. The Resseguet-Cannon friendship became an immediate concern for me, and I placed a call that went something like this:

Tim: *I can't believe this Cannon story. Are you ok?*

Bill: *Oh yeah. Never told me anything.*

The disappointment in Bill's voice at being left out of the conspiracy has never left me.

The fourth-place Derby finisher was a late developing gelding named Forego. He would later become "Mighty Forego" with thirty-four lifetime wins as one of the last of the high weight carriers. In the 1976 Marlboro Cup, the six-year-old bore an impost of 137 lbs. including Bill Shoemaker. The second high-weight (119 lbs.) in the eleven-horse field was that year's Derby winner, Honest Pleasure, ridden by New Orleanian Craig Perret.

Honest Pleasure had a comfortable lead turning for home and Forego, widest of all, was beginning to move, though still ninth. Grinding away in the mud, he reached even terms with the leader in the last jump in a “too close to call” finish. When the stewards, at long last, posted Forego’s number first, a roar poured forth from the Belmont crowd.

In the Preakness, as in the Derby, Secretariat broke last, but soon stunned the entire field with a rush that clearly surprised Laffit Pincay aboard Sham. That pair immediately gave chase to no avail. The first three finishers in the Preakness would be the same horses, in the same order, as the Derby. That had never happened before, and it hasn’t happened since.

Wizened observers saw this as another big-time effort by Secretariat until the winning time was posted. Those expecting that Secretariat had broken Canonero II’s track record of 1:54 (set in the 1971 Preakness) met the posting of the official teletimer result of 1:55 with complete non-belief. The scene was remindful of a line in *Casey at the Bat*: “*Fraud cried the maddened thousands, and the echo answered fraud!*”

The Pimlico clocker reported to track officials a time of 1:54 $\frac{2}{5}$. The chief Daily Racing Form clocker, Eugene “Frenchy” Schwartz, and his assistant, Frank Robinson, were stationed at different vantage points but had identical 1:53 $\frac{2}{5}$ clockings. Frenchy and his nephew, also Eugene Schwartz, were pals of mine from the Fair Grounds. They were great guys and practiced their profession with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker.

Much of the betting public is unaware that the teletimer does not engage when the gates are sprung at the start. There is a space called the run up between the gate and the teletimer pole that engages when the first horse crosses the light beam. The gap distance is totally arbitrary and differs not only among tracks, but also among races at the same track, depending on distance and surface.



EUGENE “FRENCHY” SCHWARTZ IN THE SARATOGA PRESS BOX (1983)

Track officials reached consensus that the teletimer time of 1:55 was in error and posted their clocker's time of 1:54 ²/₅ as official. DRF posted their guys' time (1:53 ²/₅) next to the Pimlico time in their publication.

In the ensuing week, CBS Sports timed the videotape of the race, and the result matched the DRF time of 1:53 ²/₅. But Pimlico stuck with the 1:54 ²/₅ as official. And there it remained for thirty-nine years.

In 2012, the Maryland Racing Commission agreed to hear an appeal from Secretariat's owner, Penny Chenery. Her videographer's expert testimony established, through digital analysis, that the horse had set a new stakes and track record of 1:53 flat. For me, however, Frenchy still gets the nod. That winning time will always be 1:53 ²/₅.

No moment defined Secretariat's greatness more than his wondrous 1973 Belmont Stakes in which he established a still unequaled record of 2:24 flat for a mile and a half on the dirt. The evocation of the thirty-one-length gap between him and runner-up, Twice a Prince, endures indelibly.

No less stunning is that the second fastest time in the 1.5-mile Belmont Stakes (Easy Goer, 1989) was 2:26 flat. Application of the clocker norm that every fifth of a second approximates one length places Easy Goer ten lengths in arrears to the record holder.

And what about some other Triple Crown winners? American Pharoah (2:26.69) would have been a head in front of Affirmed (2:26.80) and more than ten lengths behind Secretariat. Justify (2:28.18) would have been a further ten lengths back. Seattle Slew (2:29.60) ran over a muddy track so his time is a throw out.

These are only approximations as the Beyer Speed Figures incorporating track variants were still in development during Secretariat's racing days. The Daily Racing Form did not begin including Beyer's figs in the past performances of the publication until 1992.



SECRETARIAT BELMONT STAKES (1973)

At that point, Secretariat had established three record times, at three tracks, at three classic distances. Today's protocols would have dictated retirement, or possibly a fall shot at the Breeders' Cup Classic. But Secretariat started six more times between the Belmont in June and his late October finale.



OWNER PENNY CHENERY AND TRAINER LUCIEN LAURIN

The horse's connections faced unceasing pressure to display the champ as certain retirement neared. Reluctantly, they relented. Popular expectations of continued domination were initially confirmed three weeks after the Belmont in a mile and one eighth walkover. The recruited straight men, My Gallant and Our Native, each extended their 1973 records to 0 and 3 against the big horse.

On the track backside, he was known as "Chief," but the racing press had dubbed him "The Giant Killer" in tribute to his training upsets of five-time horse of the year Kelso (three times) and champion Buckpasser (once). His name was H. Allen Jerkens, and in the late summer and early fall of 1973, he was at it again.



H. ALLEN JERKENS (1929-2015)

In the Whitney at Saratoga, Secretariat faced older horses for the first time. Four days prior to the Whitney, a 4yo Jerkens trainee named Onion set a track record for 6.5 furlongs. But after judging Secretariat as “sluggish” in a workout, the Chief wheeled Onion right back in the Whitney. Onion set the pace, fought off Secretariat’s bid through the stretch, and narrowly prevailed. Within hours of the loss, it became known that Secretariat’s trainer, Lucien Laurin, had again concealed a health issue as Secretariat had run a fever for several days prior to the Whitney.

In September at Belmont, Secretariat won the inaugural Marlboro Cup, getting even with Onion and besting stablemate Riva Ridge, the prior year’s Derby and Belmont winner.

Secretariat was now introduced to the turf course in anticipation of the 1.5-mile Man o’ War in three weeks. Once again, the horse fell victim to poor planning when his handlers made a last-minute decision to go in the Woodward just two weeks after the Marlboro Cup. And once again, The Chief was waiting. This time with a beautifully bred son of Graustark. named Prove Out, with a history of medical mishaps.

Prove Out made all the early running, surrendered the lead to Secretariat, and finished with complete authority to prevail at odds of 15/1. Secretariat was now left with only ten days to prepare for his turf debut in the Man o’ War.

This one went much better. Secretariat went straight to the front in the 1.5-mile test and one by five lengths over two older grass course record holders, Tentam and Big Spruce.

Three weeks later the great horse made the final competitive appearance of his comet-like fifteenth month racing career. Again on the grass, he annexed with ease the Canadian International to his win catalogue.

Ten years later my firm was co-managing an IPO for First Matagorda Corporation. I was trying to convince our clients to invest in a Gulf of Mexico oil production company while the price of oil was in the early stages of a prolonged bear market.

During the marketing effort I became acquainted with First Matagorda’s Chairman, Will Farish. Readers of this letter will associate him with Lane’s End Farm, but he was also the U.S. Ambassador to the U.K. during the George W. Bush Administration.

We completed the offering successfully. During the Saratoga meeting that August, he invited Jennifer and me to a dinner party at the Farish residence there following the running of the Jim Dandy Stakes.

After we were seated, a lady sat down next to me and introduced herself: “Hi, I am Penny Chenery.” I was hesitant to pepper her with Secretariat and Rive Ridge questions, but she was all too happy to discuss them both in detail.

She acknowledged Secretariat’s superiority to Riva Ridge but showed a special affection for her older boy. She laughed graciously when I mentioned that our host was the owner of Bee Bee Bee, whose Preakness win denied Riva Ridge the Triple Crown.

Bee Bee Bee was a capable horse but an absolute freak in the slop that day. My friend and later-in-life exercise rider, Phil Rubbico, was on La. Derby winner, No Le Hace. That pair went from last to second, but Bee Bee Bee had wrapped it up by then. Phil told me that when he went by Riva Ridge and Key to the Mint, he thought he had the race won. The weather was so bad and his goggles so muddy, he never saw Bee Bee Bee.

Ms. Chenery spoke with candor about the overburdening of Secretariat after the Belmont. Her father's death and her divorce from John Tweedy occurred during that year. Decisions regarding farewell tour demands fell solely to her.

Our brief time together forever put to rest any previously held misgivings. She was proud of her horse but not a prideful person. I am fortunate to have known her, however brief our meeting.

Later that same year, I met Secretariat at Claiborne Farm. In appearance and personality, he exceeded all expectations. While posing for a photograph together, he turned and looked straight at Jennifer and her camera. During Hurricane Ida, a tornado tore the roof off my barn office, destroying it and all contents including that photo, my equine library and racing memorabilia.

Six years after our visit, the incomparable Secretariat would be dead at nineteen. The progression of laminitis, a painful hoof illness commonly known as founder, left his vets no choice but to euthanize. To paraphrase Macbeth, *He should have died hereafter. There would have been a time for such a word.*



THE GRAVE AT CLAIBORNE FARM

MILEPOSTS:

HELEN BATES “PENNY” CHENERY (1922-2017)- Fulfilled her *grande dame* role with dignity and style at every turn. Complications from a stroke took her life at age ninety-five.

LUCIEN LAURIN (1912-2000)- Was Secretariat’s trainer every start of the horse’s career. The inscrutable quebequois and former jockey trained the winner of back-to-back Derbies and Belmonts. Despite his noticeable quirks, he must have known something.

RON TURCOTTE (b. 1941)- He was Secretariat’s partner in every big win. His career ended abruptly in 1978 from a terrible race spill that left him a paraplegic. He has never lost his personal warmth and winsome manner.

EDDIE SWEAT-(1939-1998)- The son of a South Carolina sharecropper joined the Laurin stables at age eighteen and was groom to Riva Ridge and Secretariat. He was still in their employ at his death from leukemia.

ALLEN JERKENS (1929-2015)- The Chief was the consummate hands-on horseman with a brief career as a steeplechase jockey and polo player from his youth into his 50’s. In 1998 he trained the Jockey Club Gold Cup winner for the third time when Wagon Limit (34/1) upset Gentlemen and Skip away.

BILL RESSEGUET (1940-2013)- Despite Bill’s ethical lapses, knowing him enriched my life and appreciation of the horse. Our friendship endured until his passing.

DICK ALLEN (1942-2020)- One of my favorite baseball players ever. He twice failed induction into the Hall of Fame by one vote. In that game, two strikes and you’re out. In retirement from baseball, he became a licensed trainer and breeder of thoroughbreds.

BILLY CANNON (1937-2018)- While serving his sentence for counterfeiting, he reformed the state prison dental system and, upon release, served as head of it. Still revered by the LSU community.

EUGENE “FRENCHY” SCHWARTZ (1902-1997)- From his start at Omaha’s Ak-Sar-Ben Racetrack in 1933, Frenchy became the Dean of Clockers and one of the best handicappers I ever knew. He was kind, generous, and a great storyteller.

SHAM (1970-1993)- A gifted runner and courageous competitor, he just picked the wrong year to be foaled. Shortly after the Belmont, a fracture in his cannon bone was discovered ending his racing career. After his fatal heart attack, a necropsy found his heart, like Secretariat’s, was nearly twice the size of the average thoroughbred.

OUR NATIVE (1970-2001)- After finishing third in the Derby and Preakness, he skipped the Belmont, and subsequently won the Ohio Derby and the Grade I Monmouth Invitational (defeating Mr. Prospector). His success as a sire included 1979 2YO Champion, Rockhill Native.

WILL FARISH (b.1939)- He may not remember me, but I will never forget his generosity. He provided my first professional polo instruction with his pro. When he was Ambassador to the U.K., he included Jennifer and me on his list of nominees for admission to the Royal Enclosure at the Royal Ascot race meeting for three consecutive years. He also bred and raced Honor Code who completed our \$3000 for \$2 Derby exacta in 2019.



This Leroy Neiman serigraph of Secretariat is from an edition of 300 offered by Sports Illustrated to subscribers for \$250 shortly after his 1973 retirement. I ordered one and it still hangs over a fireplace at home.

THE RACE

Every racebook ranking Derby prospects that I have checked ranks Fierceness and Sierra Leone first and second respectively. Since Fierceness is owned by Repole Stables and Sierra Leone is sired by Gun Runner, I guess that means the bookies expect bettors to.....

Leave the Gun Runner and take the Repole

(Apologies to Clemenza and Mario Puzo)

1- **DORNOCH**- Pronounced “door-nick’ and named for the Scottish golf club, Royal Dornoch. Same owner/trainer as Society Man came into the Blue Grass on a three- race win streak that included a Remsen upset of Sierra Leone and a Fountain of Youth win. Failed to answer the door knock in the Blue Grass. Full brother to last year’s Derby champ, Mage. I have a full brother that retired at fifty and Whitey Bulger’s full brother was President of the Massachusetts State Senate. If you subscribe to the rule of “throw out the last race,” this is your horse.

2- **SIERRA LEONE**- Probable second pick looked the goods in the Blue Grass after delaying the start by refusing to load. From the emergent prepotent sire, Gun Runner, his only slipup has been a nose loss to Dornoch in the Remsen after closing from last to take the lead in deep stretch. Sierra Leone, and Forever Young have the same second dam. The Deputy Minister mare, Roamin Rachel, produced both Darling My Darling (Forever Young’s dam by Congrats)) and Heavenly Love (Sierra Leone’s dam by Malibu Moon). The blood is even thicker... both Congrats and Malibu Moon are sons of A.P. Indy. Another blue-chip trainer-jock pairing in Cox-Gaffalione. A step forward could result in See ‘Ya Leone.

3- **MYSTIK DAN**- Trainer McPeek had a hot hand in early preps and cooled off. Sire Goldcents is very useful but typically not in route races. Mom was a sprinter too although she is by Travers winner, Colonel John. Freaked in the mile and one sixteenth Southwest generating a 101 Beyer in the mud. No idea if there is a real life Mystik Dan, but if there is he better conjure some staying power for Danny Boy cause the pipes will be calling at the quarter pole.

4- **CATCHING FREEDOM**- LA Derby champ is a deep closer which can present traffic problems, but he should be passing horses late. Getting faster in each start and is bred for the distance. Might be the longest price of Brad Cox’s trainees here which could create an overlay. Last LA-KY Derby double winner was Grindstone in 1996. Freedom not an issue but catching Fierceness is.

5- **CATALYTIC**- Trainer Joseph is a third-generation trainer from a dominant Barbados family of trainers and has had success at Gulfstream. This son of Lane’s End stallion Catalina Cruiser earned Derby berth running second in Florida Derby. Jose Ortiz picks up the mount here. The colt certainly had a catalytic effect on the winner, Fierceness, who

galloped home thirteen and a half lengths in front. A similar outcome here may leave this guy's backers catatonic.

6- **JUST STEEL**- Late move got him the place in Ark Derby though well back of winner Muth. Rider Keith Asmussen is son of trainer Steve. Son of Justify, which is normally a positive, but so far his runners seem best at shorter distances than this. Dam, Irish Lights, is a stoutly bred Aussie. Trained by four-time Derby winner, eighty-eight-year-old D. Wayne Lukas. We had some fun poking at him during his rhinestone cowboy days in the 80's but great to see him in this spot again. Steely won't be done if D. Wayne and Steely Dan can keep *Reelin' in the Years*.

7- **HONOR MARIE**- Our nominee for wise guy horse this year. Usual traits are double-digit odds, nice but not quite Keeneland Summer Sale pedigree, competent but not HOF level trainer, and a tick up from best effort likely enough to be in the frame. Four box ticks for H.M. Sire Honor Code is in our HOF for his place in the '19 Derby delivering an IRS exacta and trifecta to our readers. In a field full of trainers named Chad, Todd, Brad, and Larry, we have a trainer that sounds like a Dickens (Horatio Fizkin?) or Groucho Marx (Rufus T. Firefly?) character. H.M.'s trainer is D. Whitworth Beckman. H.M. came from way back for the place in legit LA Derby. Imported Irish rider, Curtis, did well at F.G. meet this winter and was first time on him in LA Derby. No reason to switch. Dylan fans may echo "Absolutely Sweet Marie."

8- **JUST A TOUCH**- Another son of Justify looked the winner in the Blue Grass til Sierra blew by him late. Should get some stamina from broodmare sire Tapit and he will need it. Yet another Cox trainee will make his fourth lifetime start here. Rider Geroux has been there every start. Clearly a budding talent but just feel extra eighth of a mile here may be just a touch too far.

9- **ENCINO**- No lack of Derby winners in this pedigree. Sire Nyquist took the roses in '16 and second dam, Bedazzle, is the dam of '07 winner Street Sense. Before the last chance Derby points race (Lexington Stakes at Keeneland) on 4/13, all his starts were on the synthetic at Turfway. Led all the way in the Lex and put away fave, The Wine Steward, in deep stretch. Owner-breeder Godolphin (Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed) has nothing but blue bloods in their barn but has been out of the money in five Ky Derby shots. Hard to pick this guy but look out if he sheikhs loose on the lead.

10- **TO PASSWORD (JPN)**- New Derby rule guarantees one slot to the winner of a points for races system there. This guy is undefeated from two lifetime starts. Both at a mile and one eighth and both at three. TO are the owner's initials and are in most of his horses' names. First win was a \$81,900 maiden. Second was a \$225,800 number called (no kidding) the Fukuryu Stakes. (wonder if Fukuryu's first name was Whoduh). The Fukuryu are actually the Japanese equivalent of Navy Seals. TO's sire is a young grandson of Sunday Silence and dam is by their great sire, King Kamehameha. Impossible to handicap this guy even with the password.

11- **FOREVER YOUNG (JPN)**- None of the thirteen previous UAE Derby winners has finished in the money in Louisville. I fell for two of them and both lost all chance from collisions on the break. Thanks mostly to Sunday Silence, the Japanese bred are competitive in top races worldwide. This guy is five for five and his paternal great grandsire is Sunday Silence. Trainer Yahagi did not fall off the back of a rickshaw and has trained two Breeders Cup winners. Pedigree suggests he will get the mile and a quarter so you will not have to chant the Dylan lyrics: "May you stay. Forever Young."

12- **TRACK PHANTOM**- At a mile and a sixteenth he ran off three straight wins including two LA Derby preps. Looked like the winner in the Risen Star (mile and an eighth) until caught late by Sierra Leone. Then truly became the phantom when fading to fourth in the LA Derby at a mile and three sixteenths. The extra sixteenth in Louisville does not hold promise from form so far. This top trainer/jock combo in Asmussen/Rosario cannot be dismissed but T.P. must get an uncontested lead to have a ghost of a chance.

13- **WEST SARATOGA**- Doesn't lack experience with ten starts, and due respect for 2YO score in the Iroquois over CD surface. An \$11K yearling with nearly \$500K in earnings puts him at the top of the class in ROI. Low profile connections got here by clever and legit point compilation. Trainer Demeritte has outlived terminal illness diagnoses with constant good humor. W.S. has hit the board in all three starts at three but Tampa and Turfway do not usually rhyme with Roses. Not inclined to follow Horace Greeey's advice to "Go west, young man" but would love to see these guys blow up the superfecta.

14- **ENDLESSLY**- Was in control late in the Jeff Ruby Stakes on the Turfway synthetic surface. The only loss in six starts was in BC Juvenile Turf last year. This will be his first non-grass/synthetic start. Highly competent trainer/jock combo of McCarthy/Rispoli would probably have started fave had they opted for the same day American Derby run on the mowed part. Only horses to complete the Jeff Ruby-Ky Derby double so far are Lil E. Tee, '92 and Animal Kingdom, '11. The wait for a repeat could go on Endlessly.

15- **DOMESTIC PRODUCT**- Was second in the Holy Bull when Fierceness ran a dull third in his 3YO debut. D.P. won a slow Tampa Bay Derby in a no-bet event when the tote machines broke down. Makes sense as D.P.'s sire is Practical Joke and dam is Goods and Services. Trainer Chad Brown noted that the colt outworked stablemate Tuscan Gold in a recent prep. That got my attention as that one was my LA Derby pick, and he ran a close third. T.G. did not make the Derby points cut but still an interesting data point. Quality connections but loses rider Gaffalione to Sierra Leone. No loss as Irad Ortiz will step in. Needs major step forward from TB. But interesting outsider might produce.

16- **GRAND MO THE FIRST**- After two straight wins at two to begin his career, has produced four consecutive thirds including the Tampa Bay and Florida Derbies. Owner, trainer, jockey are unfamiliar to me so no comments there. Sire Uncle Mo is doing great. In most recent work he was Slo-Mo.

17- **FIERCENESS**- Likely fave is trying to be the fourth B.C. Juvenile Champ out of thirty-nine to complete the Juvenile-Derby Double. He was much the best in the Juvenile last year and buried a so-so field in the Florida Derby. He did throw in a couple sub-par efforts as a heavy favorite in between those big scores. Son of hot young sire, City of Light, enjoys top connections in Pletcher and Johnny V. Will take plenty of dough at the window but we will try to pierce the fierce and beat him.

18- **STRONGHOLD**- Would be the first to complete a Sunland Derby-Kentucky Derby win parlay. Mine That Bird did convert a fourth in the Sunland into a win in Louisville ('09). His Santa Anita Derby score should rate at least a golf clap as nineteen of those winners completed the S.A.-KY. Derby double. Trainer D'Amato known more for turf runners and makes Derby debut here as does rider Antonio Fresu, a native Italian riding well in SoCal. Son of BC Classic winner, Ghostzapper, will be under a strong hold until late but should be placed well enough to spook the pacemakers.

19- **RESILIENCE**- Must admit to being a fanboy of trainer Mott for over a half century, beginning at the F.G when he and Frankie Brothers were assistants to Jack Van Berg. Officially now in the HOF and belonged there long ago. Bet this colt in the Risen Star and ran a decent fourth coming off a maiden win. Next start adding blinkers produced an in-hand win in the Wood. Rider Johnny V. leaves for the favorite, Fierceness. But Junior Alvarado has won some biggies for Mott. The Wood field was a bit light in quality, so another big step forward is needed and not impossible.

20- **SOCIETY MAN**- Owner is a partnership called West Paces Racing that took this son of Good Magic (stud fee \$125K) home for \$85K at the Keeneland Sept Sale. Those kinds of bargains usually come with confirmation flaws. Subsequently gelded, he was 0 for 3 until winning a maiden race in March. In next start he was 106/1 in the Wood and finished second just 2 lengths behind Resilience. What used to be a top Derby prep, the Wood has not produced a Derby winner since Funny Cide in 2000. S.M. has climbed the social ladder considerably of late but needs another big jump to be a Derby factor. Late addition of rider Dettori is a clear plus.

ALSO ELIGIBLES RUN ONLY IN THE EVENT OF A SCRATCH BY ABOVE HORSES

21- **EPIC RIDE**- Another Turfway synthetic lifer til surprising 50/1 non-threatening third in the Blue Grass. Never out of the money in six starts and was betting fave over Encino in one length loss in Battaglia. Son of Blame, only horse with a win over Zenyatta. Jock Bechizza (nickname Biscuit) is native Englishman who has had success at F.G. here. If his ride reaches the superfecta that would be epic indeed.

22- **MUGATU**- Wins the Participation Trophy with twelve lifetime races already. Started the Blue Grass at 151/1 and broke dead last before passing enough tired competitors to finish fifth. Not familiar with trainer but owner's name is appropriate: Average Joe Racing Stables. Rider Joe Talamo is a well above average Joe. He was a prodigy exercising horses at my local training center at age twelve. Always pull for him but in pretty deep company here.

THE PICK

Every year's pick is a stab but this time especially. We probably should just make an exacta box with the two chalks and call it a day, but we will abide by our no favorites allowed rule and proceed daggers drawn.

There are two horses here who have perfect won-lost records, and both are Japan-Breds with decidedly American pedigrees. Sires of both descend directly from '89 Derby, Preakness, and BC Classic winner Sunday Silence. Their female lines also contain classic American influences. Our pick will come from the more experienced of that pair.

His record is five wins from five starts and he is 10-1 in the morning line. Yes, I have sworn off U.A.E. Derby winners and way well do again, but I like the connections and the pedigree of this colt.

Our pick last year, Derma Sotogake, hit the gate at the break and got squeezed. He did well to finish sixth. Also don't forget he finished second in the BC Classic six months later with no races in between.

Our thanks to Bob Dylan for the lyrical intro to our selection-

May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung
And may you stay.....



FOREVER YOUNG

LONGSHOTS-

There is an abundance of double-digit priced entrants for which a plausible case can be made, but at a 20/1 morning line we settled on

Resilience- The Wood was not among the speediest of final Derby preps, but this guy won it easily and left the impression that he could have done more if asked. We will bet him W-P-S and box in exotics.

Catching Freedom- Although listed at 8-1, I expect him to drift to double digits due to negative comments over his work with Encino where the latter received rave reviews. I saw the video and don't think it is a big deal, especially since C.F. is not known as a great work horse. C.F. will be part of my exotics for sure.

ULTRA LONGSHOT

Domestic Product- Listed at 30/1 in the early line and could drift higher. He has chased very slow paces in his key races and will finally get a shot at some true early speed. Should appreciate the distance stretch out and hot pace.

We cannot leave **Sierra Leone** but of our business, but he will be our only short price horse.

PREMEDITATIO MALORUM is one of the pillars of Stoic philosophy and translates loosely from the preceding Latin as "expect the worst." Applying this to our annual Derby picks cushions the disappointment that usually awaits.

And as always,

SLAINTE

- JTR