

Horses and Me.

I ran into my cousin Melvin Schroeffer last week at Cousin Joan Brandt's funeral. Joan was a very good person, who died young from cancer. Melvin had been in the hospital for some months. He is our oldest cousin, the son of Pa's oldest sister, Alicetine. I do not know exactly but I think Melvin is around a dozen years older than me. I had gone three times to visit him in the hospital and nursing home but missed him every time. The last time I had even called him ahead and set up a time. Melvin is a very gentle man, and he apologized for missing the meeting. He had been delayed in the dentist chair.



JOHN the horse, BABY SAUL, TOM.

Melvin proceeded to recall a visit to my parents' farm on a day when I was working with a horse. Pa bought the pony cheap at Princeton sale barn. Melvin had a very vivid memory of the day and the event. It took a while before I could even recall that particular day. Melvin was quite impressed. He said it was the first time he had ever seen anyone break a horse. That horse was a bad a case. She was actually a rather large Shetland pony. Shetland ponies are known for a recalcitrant attitude, this pony had that in spades. She was several years old to start training, but worse yet, previous handlers had tried to break her the hard way. All she learned was to buck hard, roll on the ground, brush against tree trunks, and the problem would go away. Melvin was amazed that I kept mounting back up.

In those years people used to bring spoiled horses to me or talk me into coming to their place to ride their horses.

I have forgotten how many.

That horse actually turned out well, as photos below, of my two younger brothers attest.

My lifetime with horses started long ago.

My Pa started his farm in 1941 using workhorses.

I was born in 1946.

Sometime in the mid-1940's Pa had bought his first tractor.

A small but sturdy, used 9N Ford.

But like most farmers the transition from workhorses to tractor took several years.

That was primarily because it took a few years to acquire the new implements and skills.

In 1950 Pa sold our workhorses.

In 1951 our Welsh pony, Babe died tragically.

That was the end of horses at our farm for a time.

I missed the horses.

Every year thereafter I begged Pa for a horse.

After an almost ten-year gap, to my surprise, in 1959, Pa bought a horse.

A big, 12-year-old, painted, well mannered, gelding, that was named Nevada.

Pa bought Nevada from Wilfred Freidrick, whose farm was four miles west on the road to Albertville.

Wilfred was Pa's first cousin.

Pa had John ride Nevada home from Freidrick's farm, possibly in the hope that John would enjoy the ride.

As far as I recall, that is the only time John rode Nevada.

Nevada came with a saddle, but I wanted a pulling horse in addition to riding a horse.

Wilfred had an old repairable buckboard at his place.

Pa came up with an old work harness that needed a lot of oil and repairs.

He helped me with the repairs and fitting the harness to Nevada.

Nevada was big for a saddle horse, but not as large as a true draft horse.

He was about the size of a common work horse.

John helped haul the repairable buckboard home.

The two bench seats were rotten, as were all four wooden wheels.

The hardwood and iron frame was sound.

It was wintertime.

The only warm place to work on the buckboard was the dairy barn.

So, the buckboard sat in the center aisle of the barn for a couple of weeks as I worked on it.

I rebuilt the buckboard deck and two bench seats in the evenings after milking.



**Mom, sitting on the back steps.
Brother Jim, riding Misty.**



Brother Mike riding Misty.

Pa helped me with the wheels.

Farmers had been trading old dump rakes for new design side delivery rakes for twenty years.

Each dump rake had two wheels of the right diameter and those wheels were steel.

Welter's, the IH dealer in St. Michael, had a huge pile of scrap metal consisting mostly of dump rakes.

They took wheels off the frames to consolidate the scrap pile.

Pa and I climbed over that pile and found four good steel wheels of the correct diameter.

Next, we took the iron hubs off the centers of the rotting wooden buck board wheels.

Then, we hauled the four wheels and four hubs to Ralph Lehn's Crow River Welding Shop.

There Hank Goth did a masterful job of mating the cast iron hubs to the steel wheels.

The rebuilt wheels worked perfectly, and they were durable and rugged.

The only problem was the steel wheels sang loudly, especially on tar roads.

Wooden spokes and rims absorbed sound, steel wheels amplified sound.

People could hear me coming from a mile away.

I didn't plan to sneak up on anybody with a buckboard anyway.

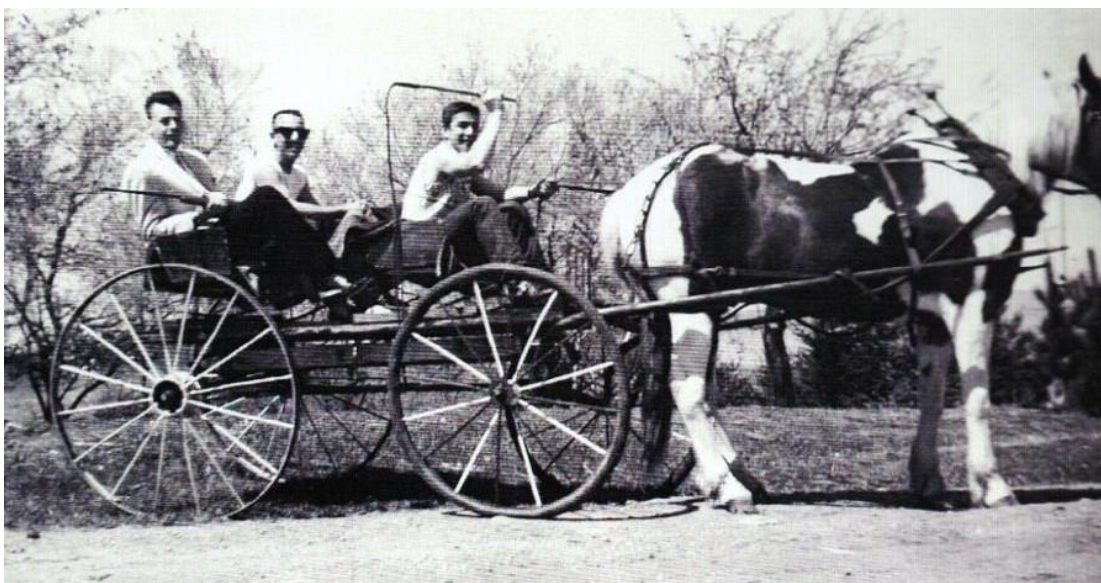
I trained Nevada to pull, first using a stone boat. I have trained many horses since, to ride and drive.

I have built many wagons and sleds, for single horses to teams four abreast.

I used to say that I have never legitimately been thrown, but that is not true. If not that, I would like to say I got back on until every horse was broke, but actually, that is not true either.



Obsolete Dump Rake with Steel Wheels



The Rebuilt Buggy going for a Sunday Ride to Town.

From the left: Cousin Jerry Couteau, Jerry always dressed for Sunday.

White sport coat, tie, you could bet his wing tips were polished.

Brother John in cool sunglasses.

Me, (Tom) and Nevada.

1960.



Tom, Three Mustang Team of Silver, Hawk, Gruella. Seeding Pastures. 1998

My son, Joel, remembers Dave Lindell's stallion that cut himself to shreds galloping us into a new, five-strand, barb wire fence.

After we got over that, the stallion ran us into a barn wall.
I sold him for meat.
Never rightly ridden.

But, Jake, a nasty Mustang, finally broke me.
Jake gave me two total bicep tears.
Yes, on one arm at a time.
On two different rides.
Only fifteen minutes apart.
And I was nearly seventy years old.
It took me that long to learn the simple lesson.
There are sometimes when it's wise to not get back on.
Maybe, I would like to say I would live life differently now,
because those wounds do not ever go away.
But the truth is, I would not live differently.
We are who we are.
Tom.



Three Mustangs pulling uphill, in deep snow.



Tom and Gail.



The Grulla and Tom, Horse camping, West.

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