



# My Secretariat Story




Secretariat (NYRA/Coglianesse Photos)

The following stories and memories related to Secretariat were collected by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame for the exhibit *A Tremendous Machine: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Secretariat's Triple Crown.*

Thank you to everyone who contributed their Secretariat story!





I was the typical little girl who loved horses, but I didn't know much about horse racing. One afternoon, my dad called me in from playing in the front yard. "You might want to come inside and watch this," he said. "This horse might win the Triple Crown." I will be forever grateful that he did. Although I did not become truly hooked on horse racing until more than a decade later, I will always have the memory of watching Secretariat win the Belmont and the Triple Crown live that day. I'll never forget how the cameraman struggled to keep him and the rest of the field in one shot, ultimately failing as Secretariat powered home 32 lengths to the good. I have watched thousands of races since 1973, and fallen in love with hundreds of winners (and losers!), but when asked "Who is your favorite?" there is no comparison - Secretariat will always stand alone to me.

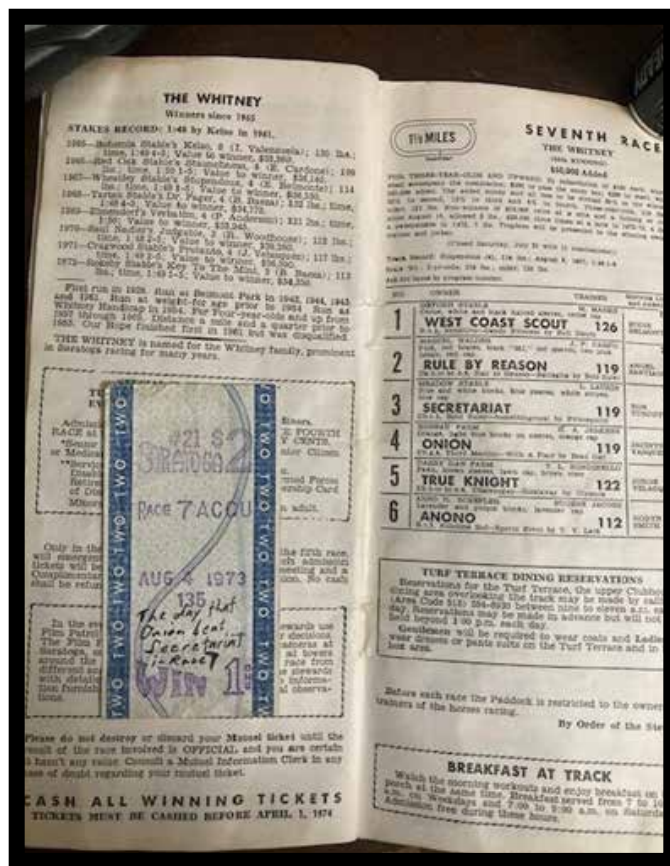
- Ellen from Schenectady, New York





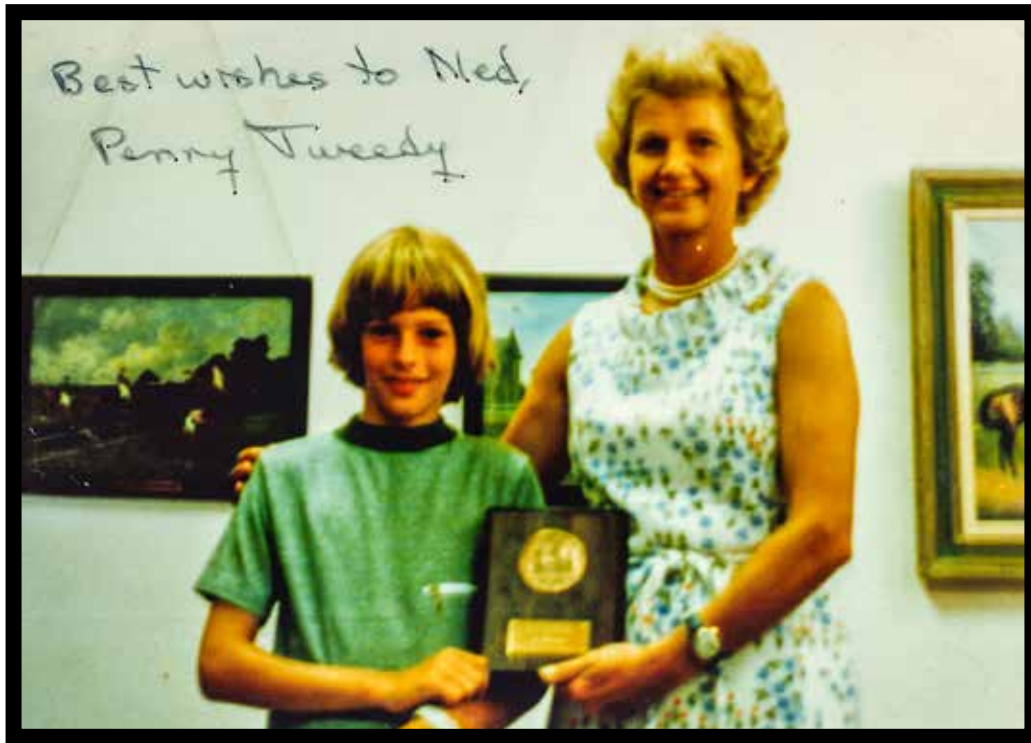
I grew up in a family who loves horse racing. My parents and I have been blessed to attend many of the Triple Crown races, along with many Kentucky Oaks' and Black eyed Susan's'. Through my experiences I have found of love Secretariat. Secretariat has had an undoubtedly incredible impact on not only horse racing but on all of those who have seen his chilling races. As a collegiate athlete I have been personally inspired by his greatness, working towards the Tripple Crown of my own life. He will continue to be remembered as a symbol of greatness and ingenuity.

- Lauren Tekely from Wheeling, West Virginia



On August 4th 1973, I was 21 years old. I had only been to the race track (Aqueduct) a couple of times. I decided to drive from Brooklyn, New York to Saratoga, where I had never been, to see Secretariat race in The Whitney. I invited my 2 younger sisters for a day trip. I borrowed my mother's car and off we went. A childhood friend, who at the time was living near Rochester, took a bus over to Saratoga race track and at the end of the day I drove him back to Brooklyn to get a visit in with his family. Anyway, that was my first time to Saratoga Race Course (the first of many). Race 7 came and we were standing on the 2nd floor of the building near the top of the stretch. It was so exciting to watch (as memory serves), as Secretariat and Onion turned into the stretch with Onion in front by about a head. I had bet on #1 West Coast Scout and still have the \$2 win ticket. I also still have the racing program. The stretch drive unfolded with no, to little change. Onion, of course, won the Whitney. That was my first trip to Saratoga Race Course and I followed it with approximately 9 or 10 trips in the 70s, 80s and early 90s. I have been to Saratoga Springs every summer since 1995 to the present. I've rented a house for 2 weeks since 2003. I even got a motel room for 3 nights in 2020 during Covid. I've been to the race track, probably about 300 times. It all started with that day trip to see Secretariat on August 4th, 1973. I approximate that we left Brooklyn about 8:00-8:30 a.m. and arrived home about 10:00 -10:30 p.m (I got a little lost). It was all worth it though, to see the great Secretariat (even in defeat). It's also great to have the racing program and the tote ticket on West Coast Scout, with Eddie Belmonte up, from one of the few races that Secretariat did not win.

-Jim Dorney from Brooklyn, New York



Favorite Racing Memory: My first trip to Saratoga with my father in 1974.

- Ned Toffey



I was 19 when my dad and I attended the '73 Belmont. On that magical day, we sat in the grandstand, which was shaking, as Secretariat flew by - it was as if he was about to take flight! Tears and hugs were shared by everyone. As the years went by, we talked about that day often and even when my dad was in his 80s and sadly had severe Dementia, he could easily recall Big Red's record breaking day, even the fractions..each quarter run faster than the previous. It always brought us tears and great joy recalling that special once-in-a-lifetime moment we shared.

- Gail Pinto from Fonda, New York

Love horse racing!

- Dennis

I never experienced seeing Secretariat, but my great-aunt did. She had photos and stories of him. I read about him and wondered many things. I watched the movie and talked to more people who got to see him. Because of him, I took up horseback riding.

- Maggie from Baltimore, Maryland





I am old enough to recall Secretariat's Triple Crown, and more than anything else it made me a thoroughbred race fan. I am fascinated at how deeply ingrained thoroughbred horses and their performances on racetracks are to American history and culture, and to our own personal recollection.

My father took me to my first big league baseball game when I was in junior high school. We lived in upstate New York, near Binghamton, and he arranged for us to join a bus excursion sponsored by a local industry to see the Dodgers play the Mets at Shea Stadium in New York. We were part of a crowd of 47,800 for the game which also featured the annual Old Timers Day. It was a treat to see legends like Casey Stengel and Joe DiMaggio on the field, as well as the late Gil Hodges #14 uniform number retired by the Mets. With the Dodgers as guests at Big Shea, many of Gil Hodges "Boys of Summer" teammates were gathered as well as the man the stadium was named for. The game itself was a thrill, with Willie Mays connecting for his first home run of the season (which hit on top of the outfield fence and bounced out), and Rusty Staub running in from right field in a pick-off play at first base, which nailed the speedy Dave Lopes and developed into a convoluted double play (1-3-6-3-4-3-4-7-2 in case you're scoring). Southpaw Jon Matlack pitched a complete game, which cost me a chance to see my hero Tug McGraw come in from the bullpen, but put Mrs. Joan Whitney Payson's Mets on the right track to eventually win the National League Pennant.

The date was June 9, 1973, and another big event was taking place on Long Island that same day, just a few miles away from Shea Stadium. The Belmont Stakes would be contested, with Secretariat in the blue and white silks of Meadow Farm, attempting to win the Triple Crown. There was a buzz through the ballpark all afternoon about the race, and as the sun trekked across a pure blue nitrogen sky on a particularly warm afternoon, our excursion bus had us on the way home before the featured event was off at Big Sandy. It might be hard to imagine now, but in the days before cellular telephones, ESPN, and the internet, it was difficult to learn news of sporting events taking place. As all excursion buses did then when traveling between New York City and Binghamton, we stopped in the Catskills for refreshments. I recall Dad asking several patrons moving through the parking lot of the Roscoe Diner if Secretariat had done it. I remember an elderly gentleman described to us how Big Red and Ron Turcotte pulled away from the field in the stretch and "moving like a tremendous machine," won the Belmont by an impossible to believe number of open lengths, demolishing the track record.

As our bus wended us from the Delaware River drainage basin to that of the Susquehanna on that June night, my father regaled me with reminisces of our community's connection to Secretariat's victory. The Binghamton area was the realm of Willis Sharpe Kilmer, where his influence and legacy still pervades. Mr. Kilmer had a notion to breed thoroughbred horses in New York State and spared no expense getting underway. His 1918 purchase of Exterminator as a workmate for his quick European bred colt Sun Briar, and the gelding's Kentucky Derby victory is one of the greatest underdog triumphs in sporting history. Sun Briar was prevented from competing in that Derby due to a malady. He recovered to contend as a three year old, winning the Travers Stakes at Saratoga while establishing a new record time for the event, over the winners of the Kentucky Derby (stablemate Exterminator), Preakness (War Cloud) and Belmont Stakes (Johren). Sun Briar was the foundation of Mr. Kilmer's breeding operation in Binghamton, and it is difficult to find a successful thoroughbred today without this sire in the pedigree.

The next day in the newspaper Bob Coglianesi's iconic photo from Belmont Park certainly inspired me, buttressed by Dad's Great Depression boyhood recollections of tromping through the verdant pastures along the river bank and enjoying carrot cake and ice cream at Exterminator's birthday parties at Sun Briar Court. I am very grateful for my own thoroughbred experience, and the thrill Secretariat provided a half-century ago, introducing me to a wonderful sport and industry.

- Bill Orzell from De Ruyter, New York

