



**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016**

**Sports Illustrated and Thoroughbred Racing:  
Past and Present**

**MODERATOR:**

**Jim Mulvihill:** Director of Media & Industry Relations, NTRA

**SPEAKERS:**

**Tim Layden:** Senior Writer, Sports Illustrated

**Bill Nack:** Author and Journalist

**Ms. Wendy Davis:** It's my pleasure to welcome back the Turf Publicists of America and the Mark Kaufman workshop. It's a really important part of what's presented every year here at the symposium. We appreciate the TPA doing this.

They bring in incredible speakers. We have incredible panel sessions. It's been a mainstay of the opening day. It's always the first thing after lunch, opening day of the last, my goodness, 10, 12, 15 symposiums on racing.

I do need to thank the Daily Racing Form for sponsoring this panel session. I'm so excited. We have a marketing and a media relations class at the race track program. I give out articles written about horse racing. Some of them are good and some of them are not so good. I have the students say why it's good, which is a good one, and which isn't so good, and why the good ones are good. I'm very pleased to say that the ones that I select as good ones, are written by these two gentlemen right here.

Thank you so much. You are contributing to the education of the Race Track Industry Program students. With that, Jim, thank you again for putting this together and I'll turn it over to you.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** All right. Thank you so much, Wendy. It's always a pleasure to be here, and to get to host this panel again is a great honor.

For more than six decades Sports Illustrated has represented the pinnacle of sports journalism, and not surprisingly much of the best writing on Thoroughbred racing over that span has appeared in those pages.

Our two guests today, combined, have more than 40 years of experience at Sports Illustrated, and together they've produced the bulk of the magazine's work on horses since 1978, which is when Bill joined the magazine.

To introduce our guests here, Bill Nack, has a record seven media Eclipse awards. Though, it's not widely known, he'd probably have more, although he quietly took himself out of the running several years ago to give other people chances.

He wrote about sports, politics, and the environment at Newsday for 11 years before joining the staff of SI in 1978, where he stayed until 2001.

His definitive book on Secretariat remains in print 40 years later, and he's also published a book on Ruffian, as well as a memoir of his life, "My Turf: Horses, Boxers, Blood Money, and the Sporting Life". We're gonna touch on all of those today.

Tim Layden is a senior writer at Sports Illustrated where he went to work in 1994. He succeeded Bill as the lead racing writer in 2002.

In addition to racing, Tim has been one of their main writers covering the NFL and the Olympics. He's written more than 100 cover stories for the magazine while covering 13 Olympic Games, three Super Bowls, five NCAA Final Fours, and seven College Football National Championships.

Prior to joining SI, he also was a newspaperman, coming to SI from Newsday, just as Bill did.

Tim has an Eclipse award of his own from 1987 while he was with the Albany Times Union. Just in the last couple years he's written some amazing features on the most significant athletes of our time, Mohammed Ali, Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt, and, of course, American Pharoah.

Let's welcome our guests. So glad that they're here with us.

### **Applause**

Now, we got a lot of ground to cover, and we are gonna dig into the history of racing at Sports Illustrated, but before we get into that, I wanna just hear a little bit more about your own backgrounds.

Maybe you can just tell us about your respective path to journalism, but then also how you ended up working at SI.

Bill, we'll start with you. We'll go chronologically.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Okay. I started hanging around horses when I was a kid.

I rode equitation, I rode in horse shows, three-gaited saddlehorses, helped train five-gaited saddlehorses.

I went to the racetrack for the first time in 1955 when I was 14. Washington Park, it was the day that Swoon's Son won the Prairie State Stakes. He was a two-year-old and eventual hall of famer. Swaps came out to parade between races. I was standin' down by the rail and Shoemaker was on him.

With a bunch of other kids I said, "Hey, Bill. Bring him over here." He brought him over, and Swaps dropped his head over the rail. I held out my hand. He breathed on the back of my hand.

That infused me with a love for racing, which has never really diminished. He became my favorite horse. I went home, and I memorized all of the Kentucky Derby winners from 1875 to the then present.

Doing that, at the age of 14, later on changed my life. Because I stayed with horseracing for a while. I became a groom and a hot walker for Bill Molter when he had Round Table.

Eventually went to the University of Illinois, and then into the military service. I studied journalism. Went into the military. Came back.

By the way, when I went down to Fort Benning, Georgia, which was my home base with my bride who was seven months pregnant, we went through Lexington. I stopped at Darby Dan Farm and there was Swaps in the field.

I called him over, and he came galloping over. He didn't know me from Adam. He came galloping over and he dropped his head over the fence, and my wife started feeding him jelly beans. He nuzzled her very large belly. I thought, here's a horse in the middle of the breeding season. He was the kindest horse in the world. He and Quiet American were the two champions.

Anyway, eventually I went to Newsday, became a political, environmental writer. I became very well-versed in tertiary treatment in sewers.

I wrote about recharge and ground water. At the Christmas party in 1971, everybody knew I loved racing, when everybody was well into the eggnog they said, "Bill, give us the Derby winners."

I stood up on a table in the middle of the city room and I started, "Aristides, Vagrant, Baden-Baden, Day Star, Lord Murphy, Fonso, Hindoo, Apollo, Leonatus, Buchanan, Joe Cotton, Ben Ali, Montrose, Macbeth, Spokane, Riley, Kingman, Azra,

Lookout, Chant, Halma, Plaudit, Manuel, and Lieutenant Gibson." That's the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will not belabor you with the 20<sup>th</sup>.

I dismounted from the table at the end of the ressitation, and the editor or the paper, David Laventhol said, "Why do you know that?"

I said, "Gee, Dave. Everybody knows that. I learned that in first grade. Didn't you learn that?"

He said, "No, seriously." I gave him my background, which is what I just told you, groom and a hot walker.

He says, "You're not happy covering recharge and sewers are you?" I said, "Not particularly."

He said, "Would you like to be our racing writer?" Newsday was a six day a week paper, goin' to seven days a week in April.

I said, "I'd love to do that." Gonna make my hobby my job.

He said, "Do you gamble?" I said, "Very little. I'm not interested in gambling. I just love horses and being around them."

That March of '72 I came on the racetrack and two months later an unraced, unknown, two-year-old came up from Hialeah named Secretariat. He and I started together.

We hooked up very early, and I eventually wrote the book. Then I became a columnist, and then went to Sports Illustrated. I was a general assignment reporter.

Bill Leggett was doing a very fine job covering horse racing for the magazine.

Whitney Tower had been covering it until he left. Whitney Tower was a Whitney. His mother was C.V. Whitney's sister, Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney's sister.

Whitney covered the blue bloods on the race track cuz he understood them. He dug their way of life. Was very wealthy himself and loved covering horse racing. He knew Mr. Mellon and C.V. Whitney and Sonny Whitney and all of the Woodwards, and all of those people.

Then he left and Bill Leggett took over.

Then I came, and Bill was getting' older and wanted to move on, I guess, so I started covering.

That's how I got to Sports Illustrated, because I memorized all the Derby winners when I was 14 years old. Anyway, that's my story.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Now, Tim, if you could start from 1900 and give us the Derby winners up through like 1940.

No.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** That's not gonna take long at all.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Tell us how you got into sports writing and then ultimately ended up —

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Could not be more different from Bill's background.

I was raised in Upstate New York. Did the usual sports things, football, basketball, track, and went to a small college in New England, Williams College. Played some sports there.

When I ran out of talent, like we all do eventually, I shifted over to writing about sports.

In the summer of 1976, and then again in '77, I got an internship at the Schenectady Gazette in Schenectady New York.

In 1977, one Friday, I was in the office and the guy who covered Saratoga for the paper came by and said, "Are you doin' anything tomorrow?" I said, "No. I don't think so."

"You wanna go to Saratoga and cover the Alabama? I don't feel like goin'."

I said, "Sure." He gave me the pin, the parking pass. In the second weekend of 1977 I covered the Alabama at Saratoga. It was the first horserace I had ever seen with my eyes.

I had seen, obviously Secretariat, and some other horses, on television, but the first time I was ever in an environment where there were real horses racing I was covering the race.

From there I got a full-time job with the Gazette. Did more and more, in August I did a lot of work at the paper.

Switched to the Albany paper in 1986, and would spent August at Saratoga and various trips to Belmont to do some features and things like that.

Went to Newsday in 1988 after Bill had been there. Had you left by then, '88? Yeah, you had.

Sure.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Seventy-eight.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Paul Moran was the brilliant turf writer at Newsday at the time. Paul was very generous and allowed me to intrude on his turf on a regular basis and do a feature story here or there.

Went to SI in 1994. Bill stayed seven years after that.

When Bill left, Sandy Bailey, now Sandy Rosenbush, who was the horseracing editor at the time, called me when Bill left the magazine, and said, "You realize now you're the racing writer because there's nobody else here that I can give the job to."

Since then I have covered racing for SI along with everything else, because, as we'll probably get into at some point, racing isn't a full-time job for a journalist in America, 2016.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** You guys were both in good spots already before you went to SI.

Can you just try to explain to us what Sports Illustrated represented to you before you went to work there and what was appealing about writing for a magazine after newspapers for so many years?

**Mr. Bill Nack:** I wanted to write — when I was a newspaperman, I hungered to write the lengthy stuff, longer magazine — I aspired to be a magazine writer when I was a newspaperman.

When I started covering Secretariat, and hangin' around him every morning, my aspiration was to do a story for Esquire magazine. I thought that would be the nines.

To appear in a great men's magazine outta New York, was what I really wanted to do. I never thought he'd win the Triple Crown. They hadn't had one in 25 years. He was by Bold Ruler, whose offspring didn't like two turns.

I thought the Belmont was always daunting for Bold Ruler. He had a few that could go that far, but not that many. I thought it was really against the odds, but it would make a good story just tracking a Triple Crown candidate, the excitement around him, and especially a horse with his pedigree and his good looks. He looked like a Greek discus thrower.

I ended up following him. That's how I really started.

Arnold Kirkpatrick, who was the head of the Thoroughbred Record at the time, he called me up.

Anybody remember the Thoroughbred Record?

Yeah.

It was a great magazine.

It was like the BloodHorse except it was the Thoroughbred Record.

Arnold called me up one day when I had just started as a turf writer and he said, "Would you like to be our New York correspondent?"

I said, "Gee, that would be fun."

Write one story a week, 1,500 words, as long as you wanna go, and it would be in the magazine.

I thought, boy, that would be a good way to bet a name in the industry.

Cuz I think that's important when you're covering something, to get a name and make people familiar with you.

A lot of people in Kentucky, and breeders, didn't read Newsday.

I didn't have that big of an audience down in Kentucky, almost none. I started doing weekly dispatches.

That was when Ruffian came along.

I covered virtually all of her races, including the one she ran at Monmouth, for the Thoroughbred Record.

I'd also do Newsday at the same time.

I was doin' two.

The newspaper didn't mind, cuz it wasn't a clash of interest.

It didn't present a conflict of interest in terms of readership.

That's how I really began getting into the magazine length business.

Cuz I would sometimes write 4,000 words, 3,000 words, lots.

I loved it.

Arnold really gave me an opportunity to develop my skill at writing at length.

I don't know.

Some guys can write at length and some guys can't.

Timmy can write at length.

He can write.

When I mean at length, I mean 6, 7,000 words.

Some guys, when they get to 1,500 or 2,000 words, they get lost.

I don't know what it is.

There are people, there were people at Sports Illustrated who were really good at writing at length.

I happened to be one of those who that able to do it, and Tim's another one.

Some of his best stuff has been at length.

It really gave me a good grounding for it.

It got me into the industry.

It got me into the Thoroughbred racing industry in a way that I really wanted to.

Ultimately I ended up working — after I left the magazine I went to work for Ray Paulick on kind of a contract basis, just covering big races like the Derby and the Breeders' Cup for the Blood Horse when Ray was the head of the Blood Horse.

I kept that up and was able to write the book on Ruffian which was long.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Tim, you were itching to —

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Yeah.

I mean it's a lot of the same things.

In 1994, and I think we'll talk about this eventually: the industry has undergone tremendous change since 1994.

When I left Newsday, really the three reasons you would leave Newsday, which was a big and well-respected newspaper, would be prestige.

SI is bigger, so that prestige equals access.

When you call somebody up, call Art Sherman up, maybe he'll call you back a little sooner if you're from Sports Illustrated than Newsday.

Chance to do more work, throw your weight around a little more. Again, that's changed a little bit too.

Money, little bit more money than I was making with a young family, so sure.

That's good.

The opportunity to write at a place that had the respect of the literary and sports and journalism communities all at once, and go a little longer, and turns out, also be edited more, which they don't tell you when you take the job, but that's part of the gig too.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Was that an adjustment for you?

I mean, or you know that you could do that and you were dying to get there and try it?

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Sure, yeah.

I mean I don't know if you experienced that too, Bill, but the very first story I ever wrote for Sports — I had been working for Newsday for six years.

By the time I left, most of what I wrote, I'd write it, I'd send it in, and they would publish it pretty much as I wrote it.

The very first story I ever wrote for Sports Illustrated, breaking in very slowly, was a 1,000 word story on a college basketball player during the NCAA tournament.

Guy's name was Cherokee Parks, played for Duke.

I wrote 1,000 words and sent it in, and the editor immediately called me back and said, "Great. You're off to a great start. This is fantastic. This is exactly what we wanted. This is why we hired you."

The magazine came out on Thursday.

The lead was rewritten.

The second paragraph was cut out.

The kicker was redone.

It was half the length I had sent it at. I thought, "Geez, if they liked this, then what are they gonna do when they don't like something?"

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** My goodness.

I wanna learn a little bit more about the first few decades of Sports Illustrated before Bill was there.

Bill, maybe you can just expand a little bit more, not only on Whit Tower, but some of the other writers that you remember that were writing about horseracing and doing it at a very high level.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah.

When I first became familiar with SI was 1956.

In 1955 my parents bought me a subscription to the magazine.

It was only two years old.

It already had a — it's past had a very unusual start.

One of the things they did — this was brilliant, occasionally editors come up with brilliant ideas, and this was one of them.

Only occasionally, but this was a good one.

Let's go and take a whole set of pictures of a foal, born in Kentucky, at a good farm, with a good pedigree, and maybe that horse will be in the Derby one day, and we can run the pictures.

We'll run the original pictures in 1954 when the magazine was founded.

It was founded in '54, so that foaling season, before the first magazine came out in August, they hired this extremely talented woman photographer who never did sports, but she was an artist.

She went down to Kentucky, went to Calumet Farm, with the help of Melvin Cinnamon, or somebody down there, said, "I wanna take pictures of your best bred foal at Calumet."

Cuz they'd won all these Derbies.

That would increase the chances.

She took all these pictures of this foal being born, to the mare that was named Iron Maiden.

She was one of the big foals at Calumet Farm and a blue hen.

Sure enough, three years later, the horse was named Iron Liege.

He won the Kentucky Derby in 1957.

The one horse she picked out to take pictures out of 14,000 foals that year, was the horse that won the Kentucky Derby.

What are the odds of that?

I mean even goin' to Calumet.

They didn't win every year.

Most horses don't even make it to the races.

I knew that story cuz when the horse won the Kentucky Derby they ran all of those pictures of that foal comin' out of his mother.

I was really struck by that.

I thought, boy, this was genius.

Cuz in 1957, it was another thing, I was into racing, and I thought what a great magazine this is.

I started reading it, and I learned how to write reading Sports Illustrated.

You know, the love of my life in horseracing was Swaps.

Right?

I loved him as a kid.

You never get over that.

Right?

First love.

You know who covered that Derby for Sports Illustrated?

Anybody guess?

The Nobel Prize in literature.

William Faulkner.

William Faulkner was hired by Sports Illustrated.

Whitney Tower, who was a turf writer, was assigned.

Sports Illustrated was one year old, he was assigned, Whitney told me this story, he was assigned to shepherd Faulkner around Louisville and to get him to sit down every night and write 100 words, 150, 200 words on his impressions of that day, and to keep him sober.

Whitney said that was one of the hardest jobs he had.

Cuz Faulkner, like a lot of great writers, was a drinker.

He spent a whole week with William Faulkner.

He wrote some of the loveliest impressions of just describing Swaps.

It's stuff you don't read in turf writing.

He was not a turf writer.

He brought the Faulkner-esque prose style to describing what he saw at the Derby.

It was really, really neat.

I was very impressed with that.

That always stuck with me with Sports Illustrated.

Then they became a hugely popular magazine.

When Andre Laguerre, who loved horse racing, he had been the aide-de-camp to general Charles De Gaulle in World War II.

Because he was — he got to know Henry Luce.

Henry Luce owned Time Inc., Fortune, Life.

It was Henry Luce who founded Sports Illustrated against his entire board of directors, who said, "Sports?"

Nobody's gonna wanna read a weekly sports magazine."

He said, "No. I think it'll work."

Well, it lost money until about 1960 or '61.

Then Henry Luce hired Andre Leguerre.

Got rid of the other guy, whoever it was, and he started covering the NCAAs.

It went from a country club magazine to a mass sports magazine fairly quickly.

SI virtually discovered and invented the NCAA Final Four, and the Sweet Sixteen, and all that.

SI covered it with great vigor.

It became hugely popular.

SI is one of the reasons that tournament became so popular.

It's early days in the 60's.

The magazine took off.

One day Laguerre said, "You know?

Nothing's happening in February.

Let's have an issue with bathing girls on it."

Bathing girls?

Why would you want women with bathing suits in a sports magazine?

Because it's February.

It's cold.

This magazine has a largely male audience, and I think they'd appreciate it.

In '65 or '66, all of a sudden there were girls on the cover, and it, today, is now the franchise.

It helps support the entire magazine for the entire year.

It became so popular.

The Sports Illustrated bathing suit issue, amazing.

In any event, I'm getting a little off.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** No.

That's all right.

I also think it's worth mentioning that that experiment with Faulkner that you mentioned: that was replicated more times with other literary giants.

Some of whom ended up in the magazine, some of whom didn't.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Who were you sayin', Timmy, was there also, aside from Faulkner?

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Updike wrote the Ted Williams story.

That was in SI.

It's interesting.

I went back and read the Faulkner thing this morning.

You should all go read that as horseracing people, from May, 1955, whatever it was, or mid-May 1955.

Because, again, it was interesting for me cuz I was an English Literature student in college.

If any of you were, you know that Faulkner was not what we call an easy read.

It was a grind.

Obviously brilliant.

That story, you read that story, and then when you get to the bottom, what you immediately do is go back to the top and read it again.

Because you're just not sure what — it's gotta be great because it's Faulkner.

You're deluded that way.

Then you read it the second time, is this really great or not?

Then you go back and look at it again.

It's brilliant, but the winner isn't named in the story anywhere.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** That's true.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** It's an interesting thing.

When Bill left the first — a couple things about Bill.

First of all, when I was covering horseracing in the late '70s and early '80s for newspapers in the capital district of Albany and trying to, again, basically for a month or six weeks a year, and trying to figure out, okay, I know now how to read the program.

Now I know where to go before the race to see horses get saddled, and just gradually building up my own.

Then figuring out, okay, now I know the runs, hits, errors, parts of this sport.

I know what happens out there.

Then, by reading Bill's stuff, and in particular he wrote a story in 1982 about the troubled syndication of Conquistador Cielo, who was the great Met Mile and Belmont winner with Woody Stephens that year, and building a great, which he can talk about if he likes, but just, it was a great autopsy of what happened, and the issues with that horse, the issues with the business of that horse.

It was a great story about the sport, the money, the people, the backstabbing, the intrigue, the drugs. It was all in that story.

For me, as a young journalist reading it — it opened my eyes to the idea that, hey, this isn't really a sport.

This is like this whole — there's business, there's money, there's very bad people and very good people.

I think I wanna go write about those people the way Nack does.

I'm goin' that direction and try and get, not necessarily to investigate all that's bad about it, cuz there's bad in all sports, but reading Bill's stuff in that era opened my eyes to the idea that you could write about horseracing as more than just somebody winning by a length and a quarter on Saturday afternoon.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Bill, let's talk a little bit more about some of those other names at Sports Illustrated if we could.

Because you and I talked a little bit beforehand.

We referenced a few of the writers that you admired, and you sent me some pieces that you really loved.

One that I just thought was amazing was Frank Deford on jockey Tony DeSpirito.

Talk a little bit about Frank and the work that he did on horseracing on occasion.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah.

Frank just loved horse racing.

He was our star writer for years.

He's on NPR now.

I was his colleague at the magazine for a number of years.

Great guy.

Just a sweetheart of a man.

He loved horseracing.

Used to go to the races, would bring his kids to the races.

Tony DeSpirito was a great jockey from New England.

He was always getting in trouble somehow.

He had broken 93 bones.

He was one of those guys who was always, as Bill Shoemaker was quoted in the piece as saying, "Some people walk through doors.

Tony walked into them."

No quote that I heard — when you hear a quote like that it sort of says everything you need to know.

The whole story, you can just sort of imagine what happened.

It was like when — I'll give you an example of a — I'm gonna go drift a little aside.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** By all means.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** I'm gonna give you a real classic journalism story.

The idea is to write the entire story in the lead so that you don't need a second paragraph.

Now, that's almost impossible.

I couldn't do it.

The lead paints a picture that everything else that follows is just add-on.

The most classic example of that was when the middle weight champion of the world got shot to death in 1918 or 1920, and a writer, Ring Lardner's son, John Lardner, later wrote, I forgot the guy's name, "John Smith, the middle weight champion of the world was shot to death yesterday by the common-law husband of the woman who was making him breakfast."

Do you need to know any more than that?

I mean suddenly your mind is filled with what was going on all night that she was making him breakfast.

That's a good example of a lead that has everything in it.

One of the things I try to do, if I can go off, I decided early on reading Gay Talese and some of these other guys in Esquire, that I wanted to try to write non-fiction so that it read like fiction.

I wanted to have a narrative with quotes, scene, a beginning, tension, and an ending.

The closer I could get to making it sound like fiction without it being fiction, the better off I was.

That's what my goal was in writing.

The way to do that is to report the hell out of a story.

The more you have, the better off you are.

I was always like Tim.

He's an excellent, great reporter, making the extra phone call, talking to that person.

Should I make this extra phone call to this person?

Often it turns out, bang, they give you something totally knew that you didn't have.

To be able to weave a narrative so that it sounds like fiction, and it's actually all true.

You're not allowed to make anything up.

That's against the rules.

At least it was at Sports Illustrated.

It was with him.

You just didn't make anything up.

That's the way I was raised at Newsday, was a stickler for that.

People were caught making up a quote or inventing a scene that didn't happen and were caught they were fired, or really castigated.

That was what I tried to do.

I tried to do that with a piece I wrote on Robbie Davis, the jockey who accidentally killed Mike Venezia by trampling him with a horse in 1988.

I tried to do it with pure heart, when I chronicled my life with Secretariat and then his death.

Some of the things that I've, the piece on Sunday listed a bunch of them.

That's what I tried to do.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Tim mentioned the Conquistador Cielo piece.

To use that one as an example, you had such minute details on what the vet was doing with the horse behind the barn, in the evening.

You got stuff from the syndicate manager that I just can't believe that they were willing to talk to you about.

How does all that come?

I mean, you've had some amazing relationships to make that happen.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Well, I had written the book on Secretariat, so I got to know Seth Hancock who did the syndication of Conquistador Cielo.

He trusted me.

He knew I wasn't gonna come in and try to make everybody — I was really interested in getting to the truth of something.

Let the chips fall where they may.

If it made somebody look good, fine.

Didn't make them look good, that's okay with me too.

I didn't have an agenda. When I worked on Conquistador Cielo I had gotten to know Woody Stephens quite well up to that point.

I'd written about him when I was at Newsday.

One of his former bosses was the Cain Hoy Stable of Captain Harry F. Guggenheim.

Guggenheim owned Newsday.

Woody used to ask me, "Hey, how's Guggenheim doin'?" I'd say, "I think he died." He'd say, "That's too bad." He said, "He used to come around here all the time."

I got to know him really well.

He was training this horse.

He had a very — this horse was idle for a long time.

He got real hot in the spring.

He said it was the blue boot, some boot with soundwaves that would go into the horse and make him heal faster.

He had something wrong with his, I forgot, something wrong with his cannon bone, and he was sore.

Finally he seemed to wake up.

He had him right before the Met.

He won the Met in a gallop, and then he won the Belmont at an even bigger gallop.

People were talking about this horse like a wonder horse.

He had come outta nowhere.

He hadn't been in the Derby or Preakness, and suddenly it's all anybody was talking about was Conquistador Cielo.

He was by Mr. Prospector.

Beautifully bred horse. Ran like the wind.

He got up at Saratoga and he went bad again. He ran in the Travers.

I'm sitting at dinner with Woody months later.

I said, "Now Woody, what happened in the Travers?"

He's sitting with Lucille, his wife. He said, "Well, I might as well tell you, Bill."

She goes, "Woody, don't." "Lucille, it's okay. It'll be okay."

I said, "What happened, Woody?"

He said, "Well, he developed a —," I forgot what he had done.

He had strained a tendon or something and his ankle was swollen up, and he was sore, he was lame.

He said, "I decided, with me and the vet, we would inject him with cortisone to make the inflammation go away, and make the pain go away."

While he's telling me this, she's staring at him saying, "Woody, don't. That's enough. He knows enough now."

Then he goes into great detail.

I said, "Where did the actual tapping of the ankle take place, where you stick the needle in and the synovial fluid runs out and you replaced it with the cortisone?"

He said, "Up at Saratoga. Night. We waited until everybody had gone home. All the lights were out. It was dark out. The vet came. I had a light. I was holding the light. The groom was there holding the horse. The vet was under there."

I said, "Woody, can I talk to the vet?"

He said, "Absolutely."

He told the vet, "Talk to his guy."

I met with the vet, and he gave me great detail on how to do this.

This was in the story.

The more detail you can bring into it, the better it reads because it has more credibility.

I went into great detail on this evening that this horse was tapped.

It didn't do any good. He lost anyway.

A lot of the syndicate members had just paid \$900,000.00 a share for him.

He was a \$36 million — they didn't know about this.

My story was the first time.

In fact, I was calling some of the syndicate members like Walter Salmon.

I said, "Mr. Salmon, you paid 900."

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Did you know he was tapped with cortisone on the eve of the Travers?"

"What? He was what?" I said, "Yeah. He was tapped."

"I didn't know that. I didn't know there was something wrong with him."

Boy, I'll tell you, when the story came out, but Seth, you know, I mean, it came out and it caused a stir.

Because here was this \$36 million horse and I got drugs into it, cortisone.

Many years later, I wrote the most controversial story I ever wrote for the magazine by describing why horses were breaking down with such increased frequency in American racing.

It was the advent of cortisone.

I was told this by Dr. Gregory Ferraro out in California.

One of the reasons he wanted to get out of the business, horses were being injected with cortisone repeatedly.

Do it once, it's one thing.

To do it repeatedly to keep horses in training rather than sending them out to the farm and letting them recover naturally.

That's expensive, so they were gettin' tapped.

What happens, you're not curing anything.

All you're doing is you're killing the pain.

The pain is a warning, nature's warning.

Don't step on this leg.

There's something wrong with it.

Horses were running on injured digits and breaking down with increased frequency.

I caused a huge thing.

That story, really in my head, began with Conquistador Cielo, many years before.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Every story that we're talking about is very easy to access online.

The entire Sports Illustrated archive is — they call it the SI vault.

Everything that we're talking about here can be found in a quick Google search.

It's amazing.

You can get trapped in the rabbit hole of reading racing stories from SI forever. T

his is really the most fun part.

Really, I think it would be best just to maybe ask you guys about some of the more memorable stories you wrote and just hear your memories of reporting on them.

Tim, for example, the story about Tabasco Cat and Jeff Lukas, just tell us more about what you remember about that and what made the story effective.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Sure. Yeah.

In 2013 I did a story on the life of Jeff Lukas.

Actually Bill had done a story on him when he first got trampled.

Credit where credit is due.

I decided to go back and do that story because in Derby week I was at Churchill Downs.

You do this thing when you're a journalist during Derby week where you go from barn to barn to barn and talk to people about their horse, and you try and develop backstories on horses that you can write about before the Derby.

It used to be, if you were from SI, you would just fill your notebook up with stuff in case that horse won.

Now, because of the changing nature of digital journalism and all that, you tend to write a lot of that before the race because you just can't sit on that material.

Somebody's gonna write it.

There's a need for content on SI.com.

There's no waiting for the magazine any more.

There's a little bit of a balancing act still.

That year I talked to Wayne Lukas for a little while.

At the end of the conversation after everybody filtered away, I said, "What's up with Jeff?"

He explained that Jeff had been through a few different phases in his life.

Jeff had been run over and had a traumatic brain injury and was less than whole, and that he was working at a bank in Oklahoma, and staying with a good friend of the family.

It just occurred to me that it would be interesting to go back and see how Jeff got there, and how the people that knew him before the injury, many of whom had gone on to be successful, Todd Pletcher, Kieran McLaughlin, Dallas Stewart, what they felt about all that and what his father felt about it.

I just traced all that, and talked to all those people.

It was an interesting thing with writing about teams, people, horses, racecars, that are of the past, but there's a sweet spot for when you write about them again.

It's when people are a certain age and their memories have reached the point where they're willing to talk about things again, but they're not too old that they've forgotten everything.

I think I hit that sweet spot with Jeff. I did go and visit him in Oklahoma, and spent a couple days down there.

It's interesting.

The story was very rewarding, and lots of people liked it.

It was tough personally because Jeff was at a — he had had a tough life.

It was sad to see.

From journalism as a business perspective, it's interesting to describe.

I pitched that story.

Pitching is what you do to your editors.

You think you have a story, so you pitch it to them.

They're editors, so the fewer words you can pitch the better because they're not gonna read a 500 word pitch.

I pitched this story and the answer came back, "Sounds great. Horseracing. We don't have a lot of money right now. No. We're not gonna do this story."

I said, "Well, okay, how about — I already talked to Wayne.

I can go up and talk to him again at length at Saratoga.

That's a drive, 30 cents a mile.

That's easy.

I can see Kiaran up there too.

I can go see Todd Pletcher at Belmont, another drive."

Then I gotta go see Jeff's son in Mississippi, air base in Mississippi.

In order to make that trip to see Jeff's son, I had to cover a Saints game, and do a story on Drew Brees.

Then I could drive over on Saturday and drive back, so two for one.

I was able to get that interview.

Then I needed to see Jeff's widow and daughter.

One of them was in Oregon and the other was in southern California, but the one in Oregon was playing a soccer game in southern California, and she was gonna be around visiting her mom so I could do a two for one by seeing them both in southern California, and I could do a full story on Philip Rivers of the San Diego Chargers.

That was like a three for one to get the money out of that.

The only thing that I had to really pitch them on was going to see Jeff in Oklahoma which cost money.

Anyway, that's the way — Bill told me a story last night that the editor of SI once told him, "Don't just go to races you're gonna cover. Go to all the races you want to see people and do facetime and get to know people."

Whereas meanwhile I had to do three two for ones to do a massive wonderful feature on Jeff Lukas.

That's how things have changed in 20 years.

I think most journalists, from the New York Times to Sports Illustrated, all the way down to the smallest newspapers would say that in 2016 you have to be creative in how you do stories and how you make them work.

That's how I made that one work.

The story was very rewarding in the end, but it took some hurdle jumping to get it done.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** It is a great one. It reminds me of another tragic feature that Bill mentioned before.

I'd like him to talk a little bit more about the Robbie Davis story.

We will talk about some happier ones here in a little bit, but what you went through to get that story, and then also, what came out of it, was astounding, and is heartbreaking to read now even.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah.

In 1988 I was covering a boxer named Donny Lalonde who was the Light Heavyweight Champion of the world, who was gonna fight Sugar Ray Leonard, defend his title against Leonard.

He was up in the Poconos training.

I flew up to the Poconos.

That's a honeymoon spot for folks that can't afford to go to Canyon Ranch.

You know?

I was in a room where there was a cocktail glass that went from the first floor up to the second floor, and it was a Jacuzzi, but shaped like a cocktail glass.

I was sitting in it having a Jacuzzi, and drinking a cocktail, and watching television.

All of a sudden the announcer says, "Tragedy today at Belmont Park. Jockey Mike Venezia was killed when he fell off a horse and he was accidently trampled to death by the horse running behind him ridden by Robbie Davis."

I did not know Robbie Davis.

I met him once, I think, but I knew Mike.

Cuz my early days at Newsday Mike was a big rider in New York in those days.

It struck me.

I thought, "Boy, that's terrible."

I called the office and I said, "I'm doin' this boxing story," but I said, "I'd be interested sometime following this thing up. Let's see what happens. Keep your eye peeled."

I told the racing editor, "Keep your eyes peeled on the newspapers about how Robbie's reacting to this."

About a week later I get home and I call up NYRA, and I said, "How's Robbie Davis recovering from this thing?"

He said, "Nobody knows cuz he's gone. He ran away."

I said, "What do you mean ran away?"

He said, "Well, he left town with his family. Nobody knows where he is."

I said, "What about Lenny Goodman, his agent?"

He said, "Don't know where he is."

You know what that tells a journalist?

Story.

Automatic.

Why did Robbie Davis leave town?

It was not a week.

It was about 10 days, after the death of Mike Venezia.

What's happening here?

Story.

Cuz he was like the sixth leading rider in the country at the time.

He was really making a lot of money, Robbie Davis.

He was well-known in New York.

I started asking around.

I started making phone — I called Alan Jerkins.

I called a bunch of trainers, LeRoy Jolley.

"Do you know where Robbie is?"

"Have no idea."

Everybody's talking about him, wondering where he is.

Lenny Goodman said, "If you find him, Bill, let me know. Will ya? Tell him I got a couple of mounts for him on Monday that I'd like him to get on."

I found his original agent, an Israeli born guy named Steve Adika.

Very get up and go guy.

I called him, and I said, "Steve," I said, "I need to reach Robbie. Do you have any idea where he is?"

He said, "I can guess, but," he said, "don't tell anybody I'm guessing. Don't tell anybody I'm talking to you about this."

I said, "Okay."

He said, "Try his mother in Kansas City. Her name is Macosgar, Mrs. Macosgar."

He gave me her number.

I called up.

Now it took me four or five days to get to Adika.

Then I called up Mrs. Macosgar, and she answers.

I said, "I'm Bill Nack. Is Robbie Davis there?"

She said, "Yes, he is. Who is this please?"

I said, "Oh, he is." I said, "I'm from Sports Illustrated. I need to talk to him."

He comes on the phone. "Hello."

I said, "Robbie, Bill Nack from SI."

He said, "Yeah. How did you find me?"

I said, "That's not important. I found you and I need to talk to you about why you left town. A lot of people told me that they miss you. They want you to come back. Alan Jerkins, LeRoy Jolley, different trainers that you ride for."

"I can't come back now."

I said, "Why not?" He said, "I can't tell ya. Something happened to me in my past and I can't discuss it."

I said, "Okay."

He said, "I'll tell you what though. I haven't told my wife what it is."

He said, "I will talk to her and then I'll talk to you after the first of the year. Call me back and we'll talk."

I said, "Okay."

I called around January third.

Mrs. Macosgar said, "He's left. He's up in the great northwest."

I said, "That's pretty big."

She said, "He went home to Pocatello. That's where he was born. That's where I birthed him."

I said, "You know where he's staying off hand?"

She said, "Yes, he's staying at the Sullivan Park Motor Inn."

I said, "Thank you very much." I call the Sullivan Park Motor Inn.

Guy answered.

I said, "Have you seen Robbie Davis?" He said, "Yeah, he just pulled in yesterday."

I said, "What's he drivin'?" He said, "He's got the biggest RV in the place. You can't miss him. Everybody else has an airfoil, and he's got a home."

I said, "Okay."

He said, "Should I tell him you called?"

I said, "No, no. No. I'll talk to him myself."

I didn't want to give him a chance to say don't come.

I didn't wanna talk to him.

I called the office.

I said, "I'm gonna fly to Pocatello, Idaho."

Nowadays, with Timmy —

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Anybody else you can see in Pocatello.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah, anybody else you see?

I didn't have to do that in those days.

The managing editor said, "Yeah, go. Now."

I got on a plane the next day.

Flew to Utah, Salt Lake City.

Got a jump over to Pocatello. landed, rented a car, drove over to the Sullivan Park Motor Inn, saw his trailer, got a motel room at Best Western, which was about a block away.

I pulled in, and I went to sleep, and I had a wakeup call at 4:00 in the morning.

I drove over there and waited until about 8:00.

Suddenly there was steam comin' outta the trailer.

I knocked on the door.

He comes to the door with no shirt on.

His pants are opened up at his fly.

He looks at me.

I had a Breeders' Cup hat on — on purpose.

I said, "Robbie, Bill Nack. How are ya?"

He looks at me, and he said, "Where did you come from?"

How did you find me?"

I said, "That's not important. I'm here. You said you were gonna talk to me. You were gonna talk to your wife, and then talk to me."

He said, "Oh, okay. Well, can you come back in an hour or so?"

I said, "Sure." I drove back to the hotel, came back in an hour, knocked on the door.

His wife answered and said, "Robbie had to leave. He had a ski date with his cousin he forgot about, but I'm supposed to entertain you."

I come into this trailer. I sat there for two hours with her.

I filled up an entire legal pad with stories she told me about her life with Robbie since Mike Venezia had died.

About how he sat with a baby's blanket in his room and wouldn't talk.

He was huggin' his blanket like Linus in Peanuts, and all sorts of very strange things.

Boy, was it good stuff, from a journalistic point of view.

It wrote well.

You could see it would write well, and was dramatic, and sad, and very dramatic.

Suddenly he walks in the door.

Shook hands.

He said, "What do you wanna know?"

I said, "I wanna know why you're here. Here we are in Pocatello, Idaho. You were a leading rider in New York about a week ago, or two weeks ago. Then the accident occurred. Now you're here. It's 60 degrees below zero."

It was so cold it couldn't even snow.

I said, "What are you doin' here?"

He said, "Well, I'm gonna have to trust ya." But, he said, "I was sexually abused as a kid."

He said, "I don't know if they're connected, but I think if you stay around here for a few days, we talk about it, we can figure out why I'm here."

Good lord. You talk about getting handed a story on a silver platter by a guy who's articulate, willing.

The three days, I'll never forget them.

I mean, he took me out to where different things happened in his life.

The terrible abuse he had suffered by his stepfather who was in jail at the time.

Robbie had testified against him in court.

He took all of that baggage to New York when he came to ride. It was preying on him and preying on him and preying on him worse and worse and worse.

Finally, when Venezia died, he experienced what Aristotle would call a cathartic moment.

All of the abuse he had suffered as a kid, with the death of Mike Venezia, came up in his head.

That's where he fled.

He really didn't kill Mike Venezia, according to this psychiatrist that I interviewed in Freudian, who knows about catharsis.

I said, "Well, who did he kill?"

He said, "He killed a guy that abused him."

I said, "Boy, this is heavy."

I jumped into it.

I wrote this story.

Nobody knew anything about this.

It hit New York, and Glen Mathis, who was a PR guy at the time called me up.

He said, "My God."

He said, "That's all people are talkin' about. They're passin' this magazine all around the back stretch."

Guys are gettin' phone calls from California.

Everybody wants to know, "Can you email me this?" Not email me, "Can you fax this?"

The piece was faxed all over the place.

It was one of the most startling things that I ever wrote.

People were just — you know.

I still get emotional.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** It's a phenomenal story.

It's clear that it helped Robbie.

We're getting short on time.

I do wanna talk to Tim about what I think, to this point, is probably your signature story on racing which was the Triple Crown of 2015.

You also wrote a blog about writing your recap of the race.

It's phenomenal that there are so many details in there that every turf writer that we know was covering that race, and you had all these details in there that nobody else had.

Just tell us a little bit about how you got them.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Yeah.

Well, I mean, in 2015 American Pharoah was the latest of many horses to try and win the Triple Crown.

All of us who cover racing get into a certain routine.

You cover a prep race or two.

You fill your notebook up with background on the primary horses and their connections.

Then, after the Derby, most of that is good.

Then after the Preakness it's a one horse race always.

I tried to just, again, the changing nature of digital journalism, there was a time not that long ago when covering the Triple Crown meant writing three races, or only two sometimes.

Now, it's writing probably a dozen, maybe 15, and leading up to five or six races leading up to the Derby.

Then you write the Derby on deadline that night.

Then you write another story for the magazine the next day.

Then you do all that leading up to the Preakness.

Then you do it all leading up to the Belmont.

You have this dance you're doing between the material you're gathering and you wanna save for this one big story at the end, and the material you have to write every day to feed the internet beast.

That particular year, right after the Preakness I went to Churchill Downs when American Pharaoh was having one of his last workouts.

I was staying at the Marriott in downtown Louisville and I had talked to Baffert a couple days before.

Bob Baffert was the trainer of American Pharaoh.

He said, "Come on out and meet me tomorrow. We'll watch him train."

Again, it goes to the access thing.

If you can be with the trainer, with just the two of you, maybe you can pick up something that will be in your story that isn't in everybody else's story.

I said, "What time do you want me to be there?"

He said, "Like 6:00."

Five after 5:00 I get a text, I'm asleep.

I get a text saying, "I'm up in the suites. Come on up."

"Okay. Be right there."

I just drove over and ran up the stairs.

He's up there, and they didn't let any other horses on the track that morning.

The track was all this perfectly harrowed corduroy.

Baffert has a walkie talkie on his vest.

Martin Garcia comes out with American Pharaoh on the track.

You can hear his voice on the walkie talkie.

He said to Baffert, "Super chingon, patron"

Now Bill and I locked the word chingon later.

I said, "What did he say?"

Baffert's just laughing.

He said, "He said super chingon."

I said, "What does that mean?"

He just said, "Super chingon is good. It's just really good."

I said, "Really good for you, really good for the horse?"

He said, "It's really good for all of us."

He does the work and we do our reviewing afterward.

It goes really well.

I did some more interviewing, shook hands.

I drove over to the farms to see some of the people where Pharaoh was born and all that stuff.

Baffert goes to the airport.

From the airport he sends me a text, unsolicited.

Sends me a text and just said, "Getting on the plane."

Sends a text.

Next text comes in and says, "Super chingon. F, blank, blank, blank, blank awesome."

I'm saving all this stuff.

Then periodically over the next week or so he sends me other texts that incorporate super chingon, chingon, in one form or another.

The post-position draw was in Times Square, or Rockefeller Center for the Belmont.

After the draw, Baffert and I crossed paths in front of all these people around.

He just looks at me and says, "Still super chingon."

I pulled him aside physically at that moment and just said, "Listen, do me a favor.

This chingon stuff, that's between you and me. Okay? Just the two of us."

Cuz he's a really chatty guy and can't resist.

He's the kinda guy you wanna interview last among a bunch of people.

Because if you interview him first he'll try out all his good lines on you.

If you laugh he'll use them for everybody else, so they're no good to you.

To cut to the end of the story, the day of the Belmont my assignment is cover the race.

Unlike, again in a previous generation of SI, I have to file a story as fast as I can after the race ends, and then write another one for the magazine the next day.

I sat down before the race and I wrote about 1200 words for the middle of the story that was all about that whole chingon, super chingon thing.

If he won, that would stand as the middle of my story, with a fairly high degree of confidence that that would distinguish my story from everybody else's because nobody else would have that stuff.

There were a few other details — there were other details in the middle of the story that Victor Espinoza was the fifth choice to be the jockey on American Pharaoh.

I had a lot of detail on that.

There were a lot of nice details that I had dug up that, thankfully, had survived the media crush of that Triple Crown.

When the race actually was getting ready to start I was up in the boxes begging the police officers up there not to make me and couple other writers leave so we could watch the race with the trainer.

I turn around and saw Baffert right as they were literally loading into the starting gate, and he just looked at me and he mouthed, he just said, "Super chingon." Just like that.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** That's amazing.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Again, journalism versus horse stories thing here is access is a tricky thing.

You want access to the people who you're gonna write about, but you don't want so much access that you feel you owe them something.

I still don't know, to this day, I mean I had a great relationship with Baffert and got a lot of material to write about American Pharaoh.

I had a hideous relationship with Ahmed Zayat.

Like most people it was hideous one day and really good the next, and hideous the next, and then really good the next.

It's like it was a very unusual situation.

Most of what Baffert gave me was pretty — he gave me stuff that he asked me not to write, and I didn't write to this day.

I had enough to work with.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** What were those things that you didn't write that you — it's interesting though because just like Bill with Seth Hancock, you had the history with Baffert.

One of the first stories you wrote when you took over racing was about War Emblem, and you dug into Bob's past and his marriage and his neediness and everything.

It paid off for you ten years later.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Not for a while.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** When I read that story that Timmy wrote, and I realized he was getting texts from Baffert, this was in another era.

My era, nobody texted anybody.

It was a happier era.

I mean people were walkin' around like this.

You didn't sit at your Thanksgiving table with five grandchildren goin' like this.

I was kinda jealous.

I thought god damn, what a great way to communicate instantly with a source.

That's what he did.

It really benefitted him in his era, internet era.

It was really tremendous.

He's a great reporter anyway.

He was before he did this.

He became even more effective because he was able to insinuate himself into people's lives, Baffert's and other people's, so they trusted him.

They gave him access and they trusted what he was gonna do.

They knew they could say to him, "Please don't use this," and he wouldn't use it.

That's happened to me many times.

Where a guy would say, "I'd appreciate —" The only thing is, you gotta be careful because you might learn some other way.

If you say to a guy, "Okay."

If a guy says, "I'm gonna tell you something off the record," you got a decision to make.

You either say, "Okay, tell me," or, "Don't tell me. I might find it out another way."

You might not.

Sometimes they'll tell it to you and say, "Don't print this."

That's their way of shutting you up.

Even if you find it in another way you can't print it.

See what I mean.

It gets you in a trap.

You gotta be very careful when you go off the record with somebody.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** It was interesting in that, Jim referenced this earlier, that when American Pharaoh won the Triple Crown I wrote that story and filed it at about 10:00 that night.

I made some minor tweaks to it for the magazine story because I was just gutted.

I called Chris Stone, the managing editor and said, "I know you want another new story, but I can't do better than what I just sent. I recommend that I'll clean up some things, and then just run it."

Then Tuesday of the week afterward I came back and wrote another story of equal length, like 3 or 4,000 words about what it was like to report and write those stories.

I loved having that opportunity, because, again, because the digital world exists now, I didn't have to wait for another magazine.

I think that people — one thing that, again, inside journalism, I think that the rise of first person writing has been interesting.

Pure Heart was a first person story for the most part, and worked tremendously on that level because it was you.

It was what was in your gut.

Three days after that Belmont I wrote about what it was like.

I wrote about where the super chingon story came from.

I wrote about what it was like to report the story that day, what it was like to be there.

Rather than saying what happened, I wrote about what it was like to experience it as a journalist, and kind of as a fan too.

Because I had been through these ten previous failed triple crowns.

I remember being up in the boxes and grabbing Pletcher, and grabbing Kiaran McLaughlin, and running down with Baffert as he goes by Penny Chenery, and getting down into the winners' circle, and seeing all these other journalists.

We all had the same expression on our faces, like this finally happened.

Doing all this interviewing, and then walking out to the paddock to try and grab a couple other people, I walked right by the spot where I had run into John Servis after Smarty Jones didn't win the Belmont that we all thought he was gonna win, and just stopped right in that spot.

I just, for like five seconds, I felt myself getting emotional.

You're not supposed to do that.

You're not supposed to feel that.

It was a really cool feeling.

Then I was like, "You big baby. Stop it. Go write your story."

It was great to have an opportunity a few days later to tap into all that stuff and write another story.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** I have one more thing.

He mentioned Pure Heart.

That's the best story I ever wrote for the magazine.

It's been anthologized numerous times.

When I wrote that story, my editor, Chris Hunt, called and said, "This is gonna be one of the best stories we've ever run in the magazine."

I said, "Thanks a lot. I really appreciate it. Any chance for the cover?" He says, "I don't know. I don't know."

It could be the last page of *The Great Gatsby* and it wouldn't make the cover if it wasn't some idiot in some other sport.

I waited, and waited, and waited.

The magazine came out.

Pure Heart was well-decorated at the back of the magazine, about 12 or 13 pages, about the life and death of the horse that ended up with me weeping in hotel room after I was told that the horse was dead.

This is a culmination of a long story about my personal relationship with the horse.

When the magazine came out Lenny Dykstra was on the cover, who's now, I think, in jail.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** He's got a book out actually.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** What?

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** He's got a book out.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Does he?

Good for him.

**[Laughter]**

Anyway, he's on the cover, this worthless baseball player, and they flagged about three other stories inside saying,

"This issue includes this and this and this."

No mention of my story.

About two weeks later, the managing editor calls me up and he says, "I can't believe this."

I said, "What can't you believe?"

He says, "My God, we've gotten 456 letters on your story, with men saying that they were crying at the end of it. Isn't that amazing?"

I said, "No." I said, "Did you read it, Mark? Did you read the God damn story?"

"Well, yeah. I put it in the magazine."

I said, "Well, Jesus. Read it."

It was so frustrating.

His problem is he's a hockey writer.

That's what he covered.

He got in the magazine writing about hockey.

Anyway, it was very frustrating at times writing for the magazine.

It didn't matter.

You could be Faulkner, and there wouldn't be a flag on the front cover.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Just one last thing I wanted to say, going back to something Bill said.

What was the Shoemaker quote you had?

Early when you were talking you said Shoemaker said something really pithy.

I can't remember what it was.

It was a good line about the jockey that Deford wrote about.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah.

Tony DeSpirito.

Some people walk through doors.

Tony ran into them.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** Yeah.

Just a quick Shoemaker story from me as a young journalist.

When I was back in the minor leagues working in Albany I covered Mike Tyson, the boxer, as part of my work in Albany.

I went to a fight in Las Vegas.

At the time, I was also working on a story which was a historical retrospective on the '62 Travers between Jaipur and Ridan, which featured a stretch run between Bill Shoemaker and Manuel Ycaza.

I thought, well, I'm in Las Vegas.

I can take a short flight over to LA and land and go to Hollywood Park and see Shoemaker.

That's another two for one.

Which was really important for small newspapers even in 1985, or whatever it was.

I was totally green.

I had this idea that the great Bill Shoemaker, Willy Shoemaker, was this wonderful gentleman who would sit down with me, and talk with me, for 45 minutes about the 1962 Travers.

I had no idea that Shoemaker was actually kinda tightlipped and not the nicest man in the world to journalists in general, but I was green.

I went there and met the publicity people at Hollywood Park.

They took me too the jocks' room.

Shoemaker was playing cards with the other jocks.

I came in and I reached over and shook hands.

He didn't look up.

I said, "I'm Tim Layden from the Albany Times Union. I'm here to talk to you about the '62 Travers."

"Mm-hmm."

He's there playing cards.

I said, "Did you wanna talk about that?"

He said, "Yep. Go ahead."

There's all these other jockeys sitting around the table.

"You just want me to start asking questions?"

"Yep."

I put my tape recorder down.

He took it and slid it off to the side.

It was painful.

I tried for probably what amounted to about eight minutes, but felt like three days to me, asking questions and he would say, "Yep. Nope. Yep. Nope."

Finally I got to the point where I was asking him about Manuel Ycaza who was this really tough strong-handed Latino jockey from New York.

At the end of all this, "He was so tough. You did this. You did that. He was a tough guy and you beat him that day."

Shoemaker just goes, "He wasn't as tough on the inside as he was on the outside."

Then he went back to playing cards.

**[Laughter]**

I think that was the only quote I used from Shoemaker in a 4,000 word story.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Silent Shoe. That's what they called him, Silent Shoe.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** I'm hopeful that we will have some questions from the audience.

If you do, I know we gotta get to wrapping up, but please make your way to the microphone if you do have a question.

In the meantime, while we await those questions from the audience, I'd just like to ask you both for some takes on turf writing today.

Tim, I'll start with you because I'm curious about Sports Illustrated specifically and whether you get much feedback from the readers.

Daily newspapers, they are using metrics now to dole out the coverage.

I'm curious if you're subject to that, and if we're still going to see as much racing in the magazine.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** We were conversing earlier.

There are no longer any full-time turf writers and newspapers anywhere in America.

There's sports specific websites that are basically industry connected.

I mean, the short answer is, you can do a whole other symposium on this, horseracing, almost everything but the NFL and maybe college football are niche sports in America now.

Nothing is really a big broad-based sport anymore.

Certainly horseracing isn't.

They're happy to let me cover the Triple Crown so far.

They did not send me to the Breeders' Cup this year.

They had me do a long story on Art's horse, California Chrome before the Breeders' Cup, all by phone.

No travel for that. Metrics-wise, horseracing does pretty well around the Triple Crown.

My sense from my social media feeds and such is that horseracing has a very passionate audience that the people that measure metrics in media would say is small.

I don't know any way to go to my editors at SI and say, "We should do more." Because they're gonna tell me what the numbers are.

It's very hard to fight that. Again, I wanna do what I thought was a great story on Jeff Lukas and they made me do two for ones.

It's a hard battle to fight is all I can say.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** There'll always be a place for a great story if you come across it, if you feel passionate about it.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** I think so, but I can't say for sure.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Bill, who do you like to read these days?

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Him, and Jay Hovdey of the Racing Form.

Andy Byers just retired.

He's no longer writing for the Washington Post.

The Post does not have a turf writer any more.

Let's see.

Steve Crist is retired.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** We'll introduce you to some of the younger ones.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Yeah.

Would ya?

**Mr. Tim Layden:** The sad thing is, a lot of people are doing, during the past three or four Triple Crowns and a lot of the year, I think Drake does good writing, Joe Drake, for the Times.

Dana O'Neil from ESPN has just started covering racing.

She's a college basketball writer, but she's done a great job.

Pat Forde does a terrific job at Yahoo.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Oh, Pat Forde. I should have mentioned him.

**Mr. Tim Layden:** It's not his full-time job either.

It's none of our full time jobs, but Pad does a good job.

Dick Jerardi, who works for the Racing Form and the Philadelphia Daily News, tremendous writer.

Jay Privman is great.

There's plenty of people doin' good work.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Absolutely.

We are blessed with so many talented writers in this sport.

Did we have any questions from the audience?

Alright.

If not, hang around and talk to these guys.

We are so grateful for them being here, and especially grateful for their words over the last several decades.

Let's give them a hand.

**[Applause]**

**Mr. Bill Nack:** I'd like to share one final quote.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Yeah.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** This is the kinda quote that if you're a writer you wait for.

It comes along once every 20 or 30 years.

I didn't hear it originally, but it was told to me by a turf writer.

When Tom Fool won, I believe the Suburban Handicap, by an inch, and Teddy Atkinson is jockey, who was a whiprider, was really pasting him right-handed.

Switched it left-handed, back to right-handed, back to left.

He was carrying 136 pounds.

He beat a horse, I think was carrying 110.

That horse was straining, and straining and straining, and he was really goin' after him, Atkinson.

After the race, Pat Lynch said to him, "Boy Teddy, you were really getting into Tom Fool even for you that last 100 yards."

He said, "Pat, I was merely trying to impress upon him the urgency of the situation."

**[Laughter]**

I mean how can you beat that?

**[Applause]**

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** Guys. Thanks so much.

**Mr. Bill Nack:** Okay.

**Mr. Jim Mulvihill:** That was a blast.