

CF “Interviews” Phillip W. Weiss on horse racing¹

CF: Where were you born? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

P: I was born in Brooklyn, NY. I have one older brother and one older sister. My late brother-in-law was an excellent horse race handicapper.

CF: What did you want to be when you were growing up and what jobs did you have?

P: I always wanted to be a historian which is why I earned a Master’s Degree in history. My first job was while I was attending high school. I worked in my uncle’s hardware store. After I graduated college I worked as a caseworker for the NYC Department of Social Services, then went to social work school and earned a Master’s Degree in Social Work. After graduating with an MSW I worked as a social worker for the Veterans Administration, then as a senior social worker for the US Army in Germany, then as a social worker and later as a social work supervisor for the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation. I retired in 2007. In 2008 I founded a company, Phil’s Literary Works LLC. Phil’s Literary Works LLC produces staged readings of original plays. Since 2008 over 135 actors have performed in Phil’s Literary Works LLC productions.

CF: What was the first track you ever went to? What did you think of horse racing?

P: The first time I went to Belmont Park was in mid-1970s. At the time, I didn't follow any of the horses, trainers or jockeys. I made bets, did not win, lost interest and did not return to the track until decades later. Currently I am a part owner of a 2-year old colt named Romancing the Cat. His first race should be in late October, possibly at Belmont Park. I'm excited about that.

CF: What brought you back to the track?

P: About five years I decided to go to Belmont Park. I went to fill in time. I liked making bets and watching the horses in the paddock and on the track. Soon attending horse racing events became a refreshing and welcomed alternative to the hyper-commercialism and decadence of other professional sports.

CF: Where did you first learn about horses?

P: Whatever I knew about horses I learned from watching them in movies and TV shows, such as the Lone Ranger, the Roy Rogers Show, and westerns. In the movies horses were shown being used to chase bad guys, fight Native Americans and pull stagecoaches and wagons.

¹ This interview never happened. Actually, CF interviewed jockey Janice Blake. I borrowed CF’s questions, modified them, and replaced Ms. Blake’s replies with my own replies. CF’s interview with Janice Blake can be found at <http://www.femalejockeys.com/Janice%20Blake.htm>

CF: Were horses part of your upbringing?

P: No. Horses were neither part of my upbringing nor did I know anyone who had any interest in horses or horse racing. My family lived in a public housing project. The first time I ever saw a live horse was at age 11 when I was attending sleep-away camp in Pennsylvania.

CF: Have you always lived on the East Coast?

P: No. In 1980 I moved to Long Beach CA where I worked for the VA and from Long Beach moved to Germany where I worked for the US Army. From Germany I returned to New York City where I currently reside.

CF: What do you think about horses being asked to race?

P: The one and only time I ran a race was during US Army basic training when I was ordered to run a mile against a clock. I ran it as instructed, doing so in cold weather, in army fatigues and wearing combat boots. I didn't like doing it but I did it. The same applies to when we were ordered to go on cross country marches, mostly at quick time and double time, carrying approximately 25 pounds of gear. I didn't like doing that either but I did it. I have every reason to believe that race horses don't like running while carrying weight either. Yet, just like I did it, they do it too, which is a credit to the horses and to the team of persons who train them. There is no way that anyone can force a horse to run with or without a jockey. Race horses are too strong and too high strung to get them to do anything without their full cooperation.

CF: As a horse racing fan, how do you feel when you pick a winner?

P: It's a great feeling. Since October 2017, I have picked over 100 winning horses, mostly at Belmont Park and Aqueduct, including several stakes winners. Picking a winner is what it's about. If anyone tells you anything differently, so be it, but they are wrong. It is the hope of picking a winner that brings people to the track. Suffice it that at every track, there is a winner's circle. That is a special place, a place of honor reserved only for one horse, the winner. When I pick a winner I receive honor too, if only vicariously. It is such moments that validate my being at the track.

CF: What's the best way for a horse to win a race?

P: Obviously, to run faster than the other horses in the field. But that is easier said than done. Horse racing also tests a horse's stamina, endurance and spirit. Based upon having personally watched over 1,000 races, my strategy for winning a race would be as follows: have the horse break cleanly out of the gate, stay a few lengths behind the leader until the pack reaches the top of the stretch run and then ask the horse to give all it has left, without using the whip. If a horse

breaks too quickly out of the gate and takes an early lead, it is a good chance that the horse will give way down the final stretch and lose. That is because most race horses lack sufficient endurance to hold a lead for an entire race. A horse that wins a race by leading the field wire-to-wire rarely happens. Even Secretariat in his record-shattering victory at the 1973 Belmont Stakes kept pace with another horse before he took the lead and became a living legend. In 1998, Victory Gallop stayed at least ten lengths behind the leading horse until the final stretch when he charged through the field to win the Belmont Stakes by a nose. Wow!

CF: What are some of the tracks at which you visited? What is your favorite track?

P: Belmont Park is my favorite track. To me, it is the flagship race track of the American horse racing industry. The federal government should designate Belmont Park as a national monument to preserve it for posterity. I have been to race tracks in San Juan, PR, Gulfstream Park FL, Santa Anita CA, Aqueduct NY, Yonkers NY, Saratoga NY, Meadowlands NJ, and Moscow, Russia. All are impressive facilities but in terms of sheer grandeur, none of them match Belmont Park.

CF: What was the biggest win you ever had betting on a horse? What are your thoughts about wagering in general?

P: About 3 years ago I picked a 46 to 1 long shot. In 2018 at Belmont Park I picked five winners on one racing card. It is ridiculously easy to bet on a loser and so hard to bet a winner. Watching a horse that I bet on win is like experiencing a miracle. I am always genuinely surprised and sometimes shocked. This leads me to make a few remarks about gambling. Gambling can become habitual and addictive. It presents a chance to make easy money without having to work. That, when coupled with a personality that is prone to take risks, can lead to financial and personal disaster. For the addicted gambler, losing is not an option. It is an affront and an insult that must be reversed at all costs. Some may label this a mental illness. That's something for the medical profession to decide. Please understand, in general, I do not condone most forms of gambling. I avoid casinos, lotteries, card playing, and sports betting. They promise big returns but deliver next to nothing. Also, they are relatively easy to rig. Nevertheless, gambling is a huge industry and for good reason. Everyone is born with an innate desire to win at something. This is evident in all facets of human life. To win a contest and be awarded a trophy. That is part of life. Every person wants to be a winner, wants to feel what it's like to win, even vicariously. Some may argue that gambling is all about "action." It's just a way to blow off steam, a reason to act out, something to fill in time. No way. Gambling is goal oriented. That goal is to win.

CF: What do you think about female jockeys?

P: I'm not interested in a jockey's gender or ethnicity. I judge a jockey by results. It's all about bringing in winners. If a jockey cannot bring in winners, then that jockey should consider getting another job. Assigning jockeys to horses should be based exclusively on their equestrian skills, desire to win, and ability to work cooperatively as part of a team.

CF: If you were a jockey, what do you think would be your number one concern?

P: If I was a jockey, my number one concern would be to keep my weight down and stay in top physical condition. Another concern would be to avoid doing anything that could cause a horse to act out and injure me.

CF: What are your hobbies, if any? What do you do in your spare time?

P: Yes. I write, produce and direct plays and do other writing as well. I also travel. Since 2014 I have visited Los Angeles CA, Portland OR, Miami FL, Syracuse NY, Buffalo NY, Berlin, Warsaw, Cracow, Rome, Paris, and Moscow (twice). I like photography and have posted thousands of pics online. Also, I have sang in public and have attended graduate-level classes. I also follow and occasionally comment on current events. All of this is about keeping my mind active.

CF: Do you do anything special to stay in shape or take any supplements?

P: I do light exercise but basically watch what I eat. I avoid heavy-duty exercising which I believe to be non-therapeutic and historically has been used by persons in authority as a pretext for inflicting punishment.

CF: How long do you expect to follow horse racing? Why is horse racing special?

P: I plan to follow horse racing as health permits. There is no other sport like thoroughbred horse racing. It is unique among sports because, unlike other contests, the contestants are not persons but animals. This makes horse racing more honest. By nature, a horse is incorruptible. A horse lacks those vices that makes human beings vulnerable to outside influence. Although humans can tamper with horses, and manipulate externals such as weights and equipment, they do so without the horse's cooperation. The horse is not a willing party to the fix. Thus, even if tampered, no one can predict with absolute certainty how a horse will perform. This invests horse racing with a legitimacy that other sporting contests lack.

CF: Do you have any favorite horses?

P: Not really. Every horse is special. However, certain horses do have name recognition for me. I learned about them from the mass media. Those horses include Trigger, Silver, Scout, Flicka and Fury. However, if I have to pick a favorite, it is Mister Ed. He has a wonderful sense of humor.

CF: What do you think about the use of the whip?

P: That is a question that should be asked of a trainer or jockey. However, as a matter of principle, I feel that the use of the whip should be banned. Horses should not be whipped or struck in any way. Whipping a horse to make it run faster is counterproductive and cruel. If a horse wants to run, the horse will run. That's horse sense. Let's make the riding crop a thing of the past.

CF: Any last words?

P: If you bet on horses, do so for recreational and entertainment purposes and not as a source of income. Don't make betting on horses a contest between you and the track. Don't confuse handicapping with a real job. Keep your bets simple and as small as possible. Anyone who bets large sums of money on horse races has a gambling problem and should seek counseling. Handicapping is a waste of time; don't waste money on a program. Past performance is no guarantee of future outcome for any horse. On any given day a longshot can and will beat a heavy favorite. Posted odds are not predictive of outcome. Appreciate the horses for the athletes they are. Try to appreciate the esthetics of horse racing as artistry in motion. Try to broaden your understanding about all facets of horse racing. Respect the jockeys as professional athletes and for their ability to control powerful animals running at full speed. Although, watching a horse race can generate intense excitement as you root for your horse to win, try to confine your emotional outbursts to when your horse comes in first. There is no sense in bloviating over a losing bet. Expect to lose, and lose often. That makes picking a winner feel even sweeter. Do not bet on races while drinking heavily or under the influence of intoxicating substances. Lastly, do not take for granted that a race horse will finish a race. Race horses are strong but brittle animals. They can and often do break down. Two famous race horses that broke down at the track were Ruffian in 1975 and Barbaro in 2006. At the 2008 Belmont Stakes heavy favorite Big Brown had to be eased. In the past year I have witnessed at least three horses that failed to finish and had to be euthanized on the track. The death or serious injury of a horse at a track is a tragedy and should be grounds for an official investigation to ensure that the horse was treated competently and in accordance with the rules. A race horse represents a major capital investment in time, money, and effort. Therefore, the horse racing industry has a responsibility and vested interest to ensure that horses are treated humanely and in accordance with the highest standards of veterinary care. To do otherwise will only put the lives of the horses at risk and erode public confidence in horse racing as a legitimate and respectable sport.

Other Articles by Phillip W. Weiss on horse racing:

List of winning horses picked by Phillip W. Weiss

<https://www.philsliteraryworks.com/pdfs/Other/List%20of%20winning%20horses%20picked%20by%20Phillip%20W.%20Weiss.pdf>

Probability of a long shot winning at Belmont Park

<https://www.philsliteraryworks.com/pdfs/Probability%20of%20a%20long%20shot%20winning%20at%20Belmont%20Park.pdf>

Videos by Phillip W. Weiss depicting Belmont Park Race Track:

New York City up-close - Train ride on LIRR - Jamaica to Belmont Race track, 9/19/13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rsb8ENJFn4>

Belmont Park up-close - A typical day at Belmont Park, October 4, 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLSd-ReqYiY>

Belmont Park up-close - Beautiful Belmont Park, September 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Taa3bOU63oA>

Belmont Park up-close - petting zoo, Sept. 8, 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0c8t-a9Uul>

Belmont Park up-close - petting zoo at Belmont Park, 9/9/18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVuvyK6xS5E>

Belmont Park up-close - panoramic of Belmont Race Track

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sl_BvrhIkDI

Belmont Park up-close - skyscape panoramic at Belmont Park

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-umahEQKN4>

Belmont Park up-close - winning parimutuel tickets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CjIH4OiORA>

New York City up-close - 2015 Belmont Stakes - American Pharaoh wins - ecstatic crowd. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyHcsP3ejC0>

New York City up-close - spectacular cloudscape at Belmont Park

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW5nEp7cnyY>

Belmont Park up close - rain storm, 10/29/17

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amRQ4JZqUHq>

Belmont Park up-close - beautiful skies, 7/5/18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsaMx-vJWwQ>

