



## **Blood Horses: Notes of a Sportswriter's Son**

*John Jeremiah Sullivan*

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## **Blood Horses: Notes of a Sportswriter's Son Details**

Date : Published April 1st 2004 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

ISBN : 9780374172817

Author : John Jeremiah Sullivan

Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Sports and Games, Sports, Autobiography, Memoir, Writing, Essays, Animals, Horses



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## **From Reader Review Blood Horses: Notes of a Sportswriter's Son for online ebook**

### **Carissa says**

Seven years ago, John Jeremiah Sullivan published an essay in Harper's magazine called "Horseman, Pass By: Glory, Grief, and the Race for the Triple Crown." I like horses, and I like essays, so I read it. It turned out to be one of the loveliest essays I'd ever read. I photocopied it and forced friends to read it. A tiny footnote published with the essay said that John Jeremiah Sullivan was "writing a book about fathers and horses." A book-long version of the 18-page article I had adored! Although I never forgot about the essay over the seven years that have passed since, I forgot quickly about the future book about fathers and horses, until recently. I finally remembered the book, and bought it. *Blood Horses* is that book. It arrived in the mail today. Big surprise: I'm already loving it.

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### **Anna Keating says**

Wow.

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### **Marian Bello says**

#### **Very entertaining !**

Fast reading, bought book because I love reading about horses, especially Secretariat, &horse racing, and enjoyed everything else the author wrote about. His childhood, his father, sportswriter Mike Sullivan, growing up in Kentucky & then also bringing in the history of the horse from prehistoric times, brilliant! Also good recount of Secretariat's Triple Crown performance. Found myself laughing out loud and also crying at times! Read it in one day. Good job, Mr Sullivan!

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### **Cristina - Athenae Noctua says**

«Nessuno aveva mai visto un cavallo correre in quel modo»: bastano queste parole del padre morente a spingere John Jeremiah Sullivan ad avventurarsi nella maggiore competizione ippica americana e negli anfratti della storia dei cavalli. Aneddoti e curiosità si alternano a lunghe digressioni, in un racconto che ha il valore di un documentario e, insieme, di un servizio giornalistico.

<http://athenaenocntua2013.blogspot.com...>

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### **Alex says**

My first job after college was to take bets at the Saratoga Race Track. It was...memorable. I didn't know much about horses, but seeing the hoi polloi gather each day to drink, gamble, and drink some more was

quite an introduction to the real world.

Since then I've always been intrigued by the horse racing world. I loved Pulphead, JJS's book of essays, and thought this book about his father, and horse racing, would be a wonderful deep dive. Indeed, the parts about his father, who was a sportswriter that often covered horse races, were tremendous; full of humor and emotion. But the structure of the tale was strange. The deep dives into horse history were somewhat random and esoteric. There wasn't a lot of context and it was hard to tell what Sullivan was trying to convey.

Blood Horses came out in 2004, when Sullivan was, by writing standards, a youthful 30 years old. I think if he wrote this book now, as a more seasoned writer, it would be a different story. Of course, the middle of a race is far different from the start...

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### **Bonnie Wilson says**

This is a book haunted by two ghosts: the author's father, and the great Secretariat, winner of the 1973 Triple Crown. The author tells us that the book grew out of the answer he got when, during his father's last illness, he asked him what he remembered best from his thirty years of sportswriting. His father said Secretariat's Derby - "that was ... just beauty." The answer surprised the author because horseracing had not been his father's favorite sport, or even seemed to have been important to him. Thus, this book.

Although the term "blood horse" can mean any purebred horse, today it is almost always used to mean a thoroughbred, a breed created for racing, the breed of the "sport of kings." In exploring that history the author travels through landscapes and history and memories of his father. The tale is as much about loss, and his father as it is about horses and the relationship humans have with them.

Some of this works for me, some of it doesn't. I was not particularly interested in his father, and some of the historical anecdotes are just puzzling to me - I have no idea why they are included since some have little or nothing to do with horses. Also a puzzle is who thought it a good idea to illustrate the book with mostly small, dark, often murky photos.

The author dips in and out of history, geology, archeology, myth and literature in exploring the history of the thoroughbred. I have to wonder how much poetic license he takes, though, when he writes of the Arabian horse (a progenitor of the thoroughbred):

The Arab horse is something of a scientific mystery. It emerges in the fossil record ... looking exactly as it does today and zoologists have had trouble linking it up with the rest of the family."

Now, the Arabian is a creature of such unearthly beauty that it would be fitting if that were so. But I have read a great deal about horses over the years, including their very well-documented evolution, and never came across such a statement. Nor is the author he cites for this statement included in the "sources" at the end of the book.

The book includes instances of the appalling history of human cruelty to horses, from cart to war horses, that is important but very hard to read. The author also conveys some of Secretariat's magic, and why to this day this horse, long gone now, captures minds and hearts.

D.H. Lawrence\* wrote of the horse, "Far back, far back in our dark soul the horse prances...The horse, the

horse!" There are parts of the book that deserve four or even five stars, and justify the weight of myth, magic, and history from cave art to the present that the term "blood horses" evokes. But if I were to reread it I would skip large sections and just read the parts about horses.

\*NOT one of my favorite authors but I always thought that quote captured something of the horse's power in symbol and myth.

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### **Parker F says**

As a 30-something expatriated Kentuckian, my shared background with the author strongly biased my reading of BLOOD HORSES. Nonetheless, I will recommend this book to anyone, especially people who like PULPHEAD. Despite being a memoir seemingly devoted to Sullivan's late father, the book lacks the solipsistic sentimentality that plagues most memoirs. Who would normally be interested in a son's memories of his Louisville-Redbirds-beat-reporter father? Yet, this book is fascinating. It takes a lot of inexplicable turns into such topics as Kaspar Hauser and the life and times of an old timey well digger that make it a pleasure to read.

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### **April WW says**

I learned that I think John Jeremiah Sullivan is a great writer! He apparently writes or wrote for GQ, which I don't have much occasion to read, so I've never read anything else but if this book is any indication of his work, I'm a fan.

Stylistically, I did find the organization of it a bit odd at first until I realized it read like a giant magazine article. The book jumps around a bit abruptly and each little section starts under its own headline, which I found a bit jarring until I caught the rhythm and started to see the big picture. It all comes together beautifully.

I bought this book because the review/recommendation I read (in Powell's Daily Dose) made me think that my brother -- a horse race loving sportswriter's son -- would enjoy reading it. The book is about horses, thoroughbred horses specifically, and covers the history of man's fascination with and strange domination over horses in quite an encyclopedic fashion, with just enough historical details to keep it interesting. It's also a book about a man coming to terms with the loss of his father, and doing so by learning about something his father loved...a thing he discovered too late to share with him while he was alive. Between the horseracing, the sportscasting, and the father/son focus, I felt like this would be a great book for my brother. I found it unexpectedly at Half Price Books and bought it for him for Christmas, then realized that I was breaking my rule (again!) about never giving a book as a gift that I haven't read yet myself. So, I kept it to read first. I was not prepared to love it this much and will be buying a new one for JW. Birthday month is March so I've got a little time to order another copy. I guess I should be less literal sometimes because a sportswriter's daughter also certainly found much to love about this book. Guess that means I need a copy for the other AW too. :)

Even for people who have never thought twice about horses or horseracing, I would say this is a thought-provoking and possibly cathartic book. If you're an adult child who has lost a parent too soon (isn't it always too soon?), much of this book will resonate. That isn't what the book is about, but is certainly what inspired it. I found comfort in it. And also tears, I must admit.

Quotes that I loved (there were many, but these two stood out):

"We are no longer frightened of nature; what frightens us is the idea that we have triumphed over nature, and what that triumph will mean in the long run, when we understand, too late, that we *were* nature, that our triumph has been a suicide."

"I timed this emptiness -- the space between Secretariat exiting and Twice a Prince entering the image -- with my watch. It lasts seven seconds. And somehow each of these seconds says more about what made Secretariat great than any shot of him in motion could. In the history of profound absences -- the gaps in Sappho's fragments, Christ's tomb, the black panels of Rothko's chapel -- this is among the most beautiful."

(That last quote stood out the most because two very close friends of mine are getting married in the Rothko chapel this weekend! Yet another case of a book unexpectedly falling into my hands at the unexpectedly perfect time. Weird!)

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### **Teja says**

Simply magnificent.

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### **Gabrielle says**

This book is magnificent.

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### **Natalie says**

Words fail me. This book explores many themes - death, remembrance, and grief central among them, as Sullivan recalls his father - but it does so as it faithfully follows the horse through history, its stints as food, idol, instrument of war, and finally the precious blood horses, bred first by Bedouins and later by Englishman to be fast and beautiful and very little else. I have never read a book which describes Thoroughbreds with such a lyrical touch. I loved every page.

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### **John Asher says**

While I have read a good bit on Mr. Sullivan's work, I stumbled upon "Blood Horses" last week in a visit to Frankfort, Ky.'s Poor Richard's Book Store, one my favorite stops. It was a chore to find it - I spotted a book that been shoved behind a shelf of books on various horse racing subjects. That seem an omen that I should purchase the paperback, and was instantly absorbed by a work that is the best book on horses and humans that I have read. It's also a wonderful tale of fathers and sons, and the fact that I knew and admired Mr. Sullivan's father, the late Courier-Journal sportswriter Mike Sullivan, during my early years in Louisville clearly added to my fascination.

I have long held a firm belief of an intrinsic connection between humans and horses, and Mr. Sullivan explores that relationship to the earliest meeting between man and horse, and carries to the Kentucky Derby. "Blood Horses" is beautiful and inspires on many levels.

If you've read Mr. Sullivan's work, you know that the sportswriter's son can really ride. If you don't read "Blood Horses," get something written by John Jeremiah Sullivan in your hands. Your life will be better for it.

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### **Nick Rabkin says**

A complex, penetrating, creative, and personal meditation on his relationship with his father, Kentucky and the role of horses in history, culture, and our imaginations. The book has enormous centripetal force -- it is hard to imagine how it holds together, yet it somehow does, perhaps because it is so poetically written.

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### **Eric says**

If you are interested in horse racing (as I am) you will enjoy this book. It gives a great background on the horse throughout history, which is based on what seems to be exhaustive research. At times I found myself confused as to where the book was headed; sometimes it was about the history of the horse, other times about horse racing, and still at other times a chronicle of a man and his somewhat absent sportswriting father. It did however all come together in the end in a very satisfying book. I would recommend it even if you are not a racing enthusiast.

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### **Denise Spicer says**

This is a very well written book by the son of sportswriter Mike Sullivan. The author gives us part memoir, part history of horses. Interspersed amongst his recollections of his father, he comments, sometimes quite eloquently, on horses, horse racing, and history. He includes sections on individual horses and races, (especially the Derby and Secretariat) but also an inside look at the horse breeding business. Lots of miscellaneous, interesting or even weird, facts about horses, (including a very sad section on horses in war). The book includes an Index and a list of Illustration Credits. These are oddly placed at the back of the book but this list would have been more useful as captions for each individual illustration (some are famous, Da Vinci, etc.) as they are situated randomly throughout the text. This writing does wax philosophical at some points as when on page 221 he interjects some comments about their childhood pets, mother and son "Lab-like" dogs. "Dogs were meant to be like Remnant and Ruggles, large idiotic creatures who ran around and did as they pleased until you screamed at them, who terrified strangers but would never hurt one, who gave and craved unconditional affection in out-sized doses, and who agreed to live with you until one of you died."

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