

Stable Views--Voices and Stories from the Thoroughbred Racetrack
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2012-2013
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**Calvin Kaintuck interview, 2012-07-10 : interview conducted by Ellen E.
McHale**

INTERVIEW LOG

Interview with Calvin Kaintuck, July 10, 2012, Belmont Racetrack in
the Recreation Center Kitchen

08 Calvin started exercising horses quite young. He also worked at Westinghouse as an Engineer – now it's Lockheed Martin. He was riding in the morning and working a night shift at Westinghouse. He went to Westinghouse after World War II until about 1967. He used to work on a contract with Westinghouse. He went to the Community College of Baltimore to be an electronics technician. He went to the employment office at Westinghouse and they gave him a job. He didn't go back to school. He was there 7 or 8 years. He was laid off and didn't go back. He just missed being vested in the company.

2:54 He got started at the track in High School. He had a friend, Raymond Allen, who became a jockey and he used to tell them all the time about the racetrack. They used to go out there and would get 25-cents a horse to walk the race horses. He had already been riding draft horses around the street. He talks about the delivery horses in Baltimore.

3:26 He started by riding delivery horses in Baltimore. When they didn't go out for deliveries, he would ride them.

3:40 When he got to the race track he was walking horses in the morning. And one day when they were taking the tack off the horse, he told the other hot walker to give him a lift up. Everyone stopped and looked at him and the trainer came up and asked him if he wanted to gallop horses. He invited him to their farm the next spring. He went there when he was fourteen years old during Christmas break from school and didn't come back. His father had to come and get him. The next year, he went to the farm and they were racing at Pimlico. They were going to go to Delaware to run the horses and he wanted to go. The grooms told him to get his badge and he went to get a badge. The security guard saw that he was only fifteen and they told him to come back next year. The next year when he got out of school he went out to the farm and never came back.

6:00 He was riding for Billy Barm and Boose Bond, two trainers, the same trainer that he was walking hots for.

6:34 The horse he was riding got some stress fractures and Billy Bond told him that he would have to send him back, but not to go anywhere because he was going to get him a job.

7:15 He got a job with Winn out of Indiana for the rest of the year. Then to Atlantic City and back. When he was 16, he stopped school. His parents moved to Indiana and he went back to school with them. This was during the Depression. He also worked for Frank Bonsel, a top trainer. He worked for him for 7-8 years.

8:30 He was working for one trainer at a time. When he was working for Boose Bond he was making \$75.00/week and his friends were making 50-\$55/week. For a long time, you got \$3.00/horse. Wages raised

slowly. Now it is \$15.00/horse, sometimes \$20.00 for a difficult horse. Salary jobs go \$5-7. The Arabs pay well on salary - \$1000-\$700/week.

10:25 a typical day starts about 5:30 a.m. It is not steady. You work until 8 or 8:30 a.m. You might finish about 9:00 a.m. Usually you finish before that and that is the end of your work day. Some of the guys have another job. He had a second job as a foreman for awhile. 11:35 Calvin does a lot of freelancing. He rides three horses for Cleveland Johnson.

12:09 He doesn't consider it dangerous work. He shattered his shoulder once. He was working a horse and the girth blew (broke), the saddle was staying put and he looked down and saw the girth flapping. He broke out in a cold sweat [laughs] because if you are still on the saddle and it rolls under the horse they'll beat you up. He pushed off trying to avoid that and was trying to stay away.

12:54 In 1967, in Delaware Park on a Sunday morning, his friend asked him to cover for him. He had 21 horses to get on that morning. Another trainer – Phil Uttman – asked him to get on a horse for hm. He got on a horse and it was sore and he went down the backside at a fast clip and the horse fell. Calvin kept rolling and he dislocated his shoulder. That was in June 1967, and he didn't get back to work until the following year when he went to Canada with Johnny Tremara.

15:02 The main tracks he rode at were Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey (Atlantic City, Monmouth, Garden City). Calvin came to New York in 1985 because New York had a retirement fund through NYRA. Maryland didn't have one.

16:10 He came to New York the coldest day of the year. He started as a freelancer and he was standing at the rail at the training track and a trainer came up to him and asked him if he'd get on his horses. He had another rider come up to him and say, "watch out, these are bad horses." Calvin rode the horses and the trainer came up to him and said, come back tomorrow. Calvin said, "but pay me for the day," and the trainer said, "Come back, I don't have any money right now." So he came back and he rode for him for quite a while and he picked up other horses.

17:12 In Maryland, the half-mile jockeys, we called them "Gyps." Calvin would go out and gallop horses before he really became a rider. Some of them were very good horsemen.

18:01 They knew how to refurbish a horse and bring them back if they were sore. When a trainer has 100-200 horses they can run a lot. If you run a horse, it can take them fourteen days before they get back.

18:30 Calvin's son wants to get a horse. He tells him that he shouldn't claim a horse lower than \$35,000.00. There's no guarantee. His son works on Wall Street and makes good money. He is a good rider, too. He has a lot of books on horses.

19:40 He also has another son and a daughter. He has grandchildren and great grandchildren. (Talks further about his family.)

20:20 Talks about the Great Depression and how it made his family close.

20:40 While he was riding, his family was in Baltimore, Maryland and he would go back and forth on weekends. When he was in Delaware he

had a trainer who would bring him home every weekend. He would meet him to go back at 4:00 in the morning. It was before I-95 and you had to go through the city.

21:25 Sometimes riders talk to each other. One year, a trainer had a bad horse and he had a whole audience when he got up on him. He'd gallop and then he'd leap and everyone came to watch him ride. He learned that when someone points out a horse it's usually a bad one.

22:35 He has never really gotten hurt on a bucking horse. Twice he's had equipment break. It's good exercise.

23:11 He's out right now with a sore knee and after he's off for awhile he knows he's out of shape.

23:25 He was always interested in riding. When he was smaller (117 lbs) he wasn't really interested in being a jockey. He was just interested in riding. He got a reputation of being able to handle rough horses. He said you have to let a horse dictate to you and you try to compromise. Really rough ones you don't want to pull up too hard. [laughs] You have to learn to give and take.

24:45 Its kept him fit. Hes now 83 years old, as of April 13, 2012. He has been riding 70 years, roughly. 25:15 He has seen changes. Everything has changed. The old tracks weren't as fast as they are now. Calvin has a clock in his head. A horse runs 24/48 (24 at the ¼; 48 at the ½ mile) and now they run 22-21 because of the surface of the track. That's why horses break down. There is nothing to hold them back. Tracks were much deeper. Tracks now have a hard base so they last year

round. The tracks sting so the horses don't extend themselves and they might run much better on turf. They run Free on turf.

26:50 He had a champion grass horse once. It wouldn't run and stayed in the back all the time. (Speaks further about this horse.) He had another horse that ran on grass and then one day he was put on the dirt and he became a Stakes horse – he never looked back.

28:10 The riders ride different now. In the old days, a trainer would have you work a horse according to the time the trainer said. Now they just say, "work him." It used to be that you could only run 3-4 horses; now they ride many more horses. They would take you at three and you'd do everything. Now there are 'hot walkers.' who rake up the shedrow. The riders do fewer jobs. They used to wash horses to cool them off; now they wash to get them clean. Now they give them more baths, year round, even in the winter.

30:25 the first time he saw someone use a hose to wash a horse, everyone thought it was really different.

30:55 The whole race track used to be black grooms when he started. They were good, dedicated men who were knowledgeable. Now people come because it's an available job. That is the biggest change. In prior years, you couldn't put your hand on a horse if you didn't know anything. Everyone came from somebody's farm. Most horses came from a training center, where they were broken as babies. Now horses come from all over.

32:53 Horses are used to running in a pack and they have to get trained to be in company and to accept it. Same game but some changes.

33:36 He thinks the old days are best.

33:56 They stopped racing for a whole year during World War II. 1944-1945. Lots of horses were turned out on the farms. They just had to re-start after the war.

34:40 As a kid, he rode in the City of Baltimore. He rode the horses on the weekend to keep them exercising, otherwise he'd be too rough when hitched to a wagon. The men would buy the produce and sell it off the wagon. Some would hire a team out for the day.

36:21 His favorite horse was Hannah. It was the age when there were bells. Some days he would hear Hannah's bells and he'd run out to get on the wagon – even from the dinner table. The dairies had draft horses – he remembers Ginger. He used to climb up on her. He talks about the delivery men in Baltimore – dairies, bakeries. etc.

38:40 The horses are different. Now they feed them too much grain. He talks about Citation and how much grain horses get. They feed horses like they feed cows.

39:40 the number of horses a trainer carries is different. Used to be 7 was a lot of horses and 12 was a large stable. Now, trainers have many more horses--30-40 horses.

40:36 You have to have assistants, if you have that many horses. Some trainers have 200 horses.

42:11 Jockeys sometimes ask the exercise riders about horses. Now sometimes the first time they see a horse is when they're getting on it. Agents now get 10% of what the jockey takes in so there are some agents who have become millionaires because of the success of a jockey. Trainers get a cut of the purse. Grooms, not so much. On a \$100,000 race, the winning horse gets 60% and the trainer takes 10% of that.

45:37 Saratoga has a different atmosphere than Belmont. It doesn't feel like a city. When he was at Saratoga he used to get 9-10 horses a morning. It is so spread out it's hard to get work done.

46:51 The trainer tells the exercise rider what to do. We talk generally about horses and the trainers.

48:40 He had a horse once who would be walking and then, all of a sudden, would buck. He was taking him to the racetrack and the trainer wanted to back him up. He got him so far and then he let him go. He continued to ride him – the trainer was happy how he rode. He continues to reminisce about individual horses and individual riders.

55:11 Story about riding a horse (Joy Buck). He galloped every day and then one day she didn't make the turn and she ran right through the fence. He went off her head in front of her and she got tangled up in an anchor fence. He tore his arm internally and sprained his ankle.

58:58 Mandating a flak jacket came in about 1952. Before that they mandated goggles. They used to have an aviation cap with goggles. Then, jump riders rode a leather skull cap. First they made riders wear a polo helmet and then they designed a helmet for the track.

1:00:24 Tells a story of riding a horse with a polo helmet on. End of hour Calvin Kaintuck.

Part II

00:11 He had a fall on this horse and fell on the rail. He had a gash in the helmet that he could put his hand through. While he was against helmets, now he wouldn't do without. He would have been in trouble without a helmet. He believes in them.

00:50 Tells another story about a specific horse with the saddle slipping. He was wearing a helmet and fell off. He went home and the next morning he woke up and his pillow was full of blood. He ended up with a concussion. Twice, he got saved by a helmet

2:30 The jacket came out before 1985. The first one was like the rodeo riders wear – big one. He got kicked once and he felt the impact, but nothing happened. So he believes in all the safety equipment. [A pool game begins in the recreation center.]

4:15 Interview Ends.