

Stable Views--Voices and Stories from the Thoroughbred Racetrack
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2012-2013
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**Sarah Camele Arnold interview, 2013-08-30 : interview conducted by Ellen E.
McHale**

INTERVIEW LOG

00 Sarah Arnold started at the racetrack as a groom. She had ridden horses as a child. Her original dream was to one day be a jockey. She did become an exercise rider, and that was as far as she wanted to go.

00: 40 "Once I learned what it was all about, I didn't want to be a jockey any more. It's dangerous. I'm not a very competitive person. Maybe I didn't have that competitive spirit ..When I started out there weren't that many good women riders." She said that she wasn't competitive enough. She said it was more of a man's game in the early 1980s, and in order to ride the top horses, she wasn't going to do that as a jockey. Now it has gotten better for women. 50% of the exercise riders are now women. When she started, it was a novelty to see women galloping horses.

1:50 They would not hesitate to hire women as riders now.

2:20 Quite a few trainers prefer women – maybe they are thought to be more reliable, more dedicated. Shug McGaughey has many women riders. Michael Matz has a lot of women riders. Sometimes, it's a matter of strength.

3:11 She started out riding for George Arnold, who is now her husband. She worked for a few more trainers and came back to George Arnold. She started out at Keeneland and then went to Belmont.

4:00 She started in the fall of 1982 as a groom – at 18 – and worked originally at Keeneland. She started after high school at the age of 17, working in Southern Ohio on a farm. She progressed from being a groom to a rider. Many people start by riding on a farm but she started riding when she was a young girl. It is important to have some horsemanship in learning how to ride a race horse. Being a groom and seeing how things are run is also useful to become a rider. You mostly learn as you go, but she was fortunate to have people who helped her and gave her pointers. She

was mostly watched over and had good horses chosen for her. As you get ready and more skilled, you get more and more complicated horses to ride, chosen for you.

5:45 Right now, their stable doesn't have any real difficult horses. Horses are all individual and in training you have to see what the horses are comfortable doing. You don't have to always tell the horse what to do – it's a compromise.

6:18 She and Rusty work together on how to train the horses. She is a behind the scenes person, as she doesn't have a license.

6:50 They have been together since 1985 and got married in 1996. She learned most of what she knows from working with Rusty and his crew.

7:30 The racetrack is such a strange lifestyle. A lot of moving around. Weird hours. So you do see a lot of...couples on the racetrack that work on the racetrack. A lot of husband-and-wife teams. There are many of those. You see exercise riders that are married to each other... because of the lifestyle and I think it's very hard, especially if you have children. If you do have children, it's hard because you're going to be split up if you don't understand the lifestyle once you have kids. Yeah, I think there are a lot of couples who work together on the racetrack. I'd say most people on the racetrack – their spouses, or girl friends, or boy friends, they also work on the racetrack. I'd say 75%, I'd say Very few people don't move on the racetrack. At least once a year you have to go to another racetrack...Most people do like to move at least once a year.

8:54 The Arnolds ship from Kentucky to Monmouth and to Chicago. They have a couple of assistants who go. The groom always goes with the horses. Sometimes they'll ship the horses with a van company who'll saddle the horses. Rusty tries to be at most races, if he can.

10:06 Lexington is home. They spend at least half the time in Florida, so they are also Florida residents.

11:00 Keeneland and Saratoga are Sarah's favorite racetracks. Keeneland - it's such an event there. It's such a short meet. It's so popular. Such enthusiasm. The racing is fairly good; good quality. People get really dressed up to come. Here (Saratoga), it's very festive. It's also an event. It's a big event here. I think the smaller meets have more electricity, more excitement to them. Families. It's really neat to see the people with their picnics. You think about the tradition of the people that come every year. You hear about that....

12:11 The first year that Sarah came was 1986. She's only missed one or two years since then. She has seen the changes in the town. It's more cosmopolitan, more upscale than it used to be. They rent the same place most every year. It's sort of like home.

13:20 She always thinks it's a little bit like summer camp here. You rough it a little bit.

13:35 Sarah talks about her painting. She considers herself a folk artist, in that she is self-taught. Her father was an artist and a designer but she's never had any formal training. She used to do a lot of pencil drawings. Now, she mostly paints in acrylics. She paints quickly. She does some commissions, but does a lot of painting for herself. There is a lot of free time after you're done for the day. She does like commissions because it makes her work.

15:35 She grew up near Cincinnati. She learned to ride as a child, but her family was not involved in horses. Her younger brother just bought part of a race horse. It was a horse that was claimed just a few days ago.

16:25 They used to call them 'selling races', so someone else owns the horse after the race. If they're in the race, another owner or trainer can put in a claim. On some occasions, you want someone to claim the horse. Sarah gets attached to the horses.

17:10 That is one thing she doesn't like is that you can have a horse and then, all of a sudden, someone else owns it.

17:20 Betting is a big part of the backside. Especially the people in your barn. It's fun. A lot of people bet. Sarah doesn't bet because she doesn't like to lose money.

18:35 What she is doing right now is what she has always wanted. A lot of people are very supportive. "What I am doing right now, and I feel very fortunate that I'm a part of this life and this world. Most of the people on the backside. It's very supportive. People root for each other, most of the time. The nicest friends I've ever had are people I've met on the racetrack, so I'm really very grateful for that. It's amazing to look around and get to do this for a living. It really is."

19:25 It's sad that racing has gotten a lot different. There used to be there was a limit for how many stalls you could have. Now, there are people with hundreds of horses. A lot of the Arnold's friends have gotten out of the business. There aren't as many horsemen as there used to be. It used to be that you raised your horses and you raced them. Now, it's all about racing them to sell. Now, there are many people who want younger, bigger-name trainers. Now, there are many good trainers who have very few horses to train or who have gotten out of the business. The good thing - you still see a lot of horses that you haven't bought for a lot of money become good horses. Anybody can get lucky in this business. A lot of people spend a lot of money and lose a lot of money.

20:39 Luck is a big part of the business. Sometimes, you'll have the best horse and you'll get caught on the rail behind another horse and someone else will win. Sometimes, you get lucky that way, another horse will get trapped and you'll win.

21:11 She talks about the rest of the meet at Saratoga. Sometimes there are different factors that determine if you get in a race or not. If the race over-fills, they'll give the chance to run to someone else. The racing secretary makes the determination. It's frustrating.

22:30 She says, "We're like circus people. I can be packed and ready to go in two hours." They pretty much move their clothes from place to place. All the horse people do the same thing. They throw everything in the truck and then they load the horses and they're off. The guys ride on the vans with the horses.

24:20 End of interview.