

Stockton author researches Man o' War legend

Dorothy Ours of Stockton has had a lifelong fascination with horses, particularly Thoroughbred racing. As a child, a love of Secretariat soon led to an interest in another legendary racehorse; the mighty Man o' War.

In 1994, an intensive search through vintage microfilm newspapers convinced Dorothy that Man o' War's actual story was even more remarkable than the legend. While working office jobs, Dorothy spent her free time exploring important sites from Man o' War's life, constantly hunting for information from original sources. "I was working full-time at a music college, so I fit in my research whenever I could," Dorothy remembers. "At first, it was more like putting together an encyclopedia; there was so much information on Man o' War to work with, and much of it had been overlooked for many years."

In 1998, Dorothy began working for the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. "I spent seven years there and it was a great experience," she added. "I had the chance to learn much more about Man o' War and other famous racehorses."

At the museum, Ours enjoyed a wide range of experiences behind the scenes in the racing world. As a researcher, she has been cited for contributions to such books as "Man o' War" by Edward L. Bowen, "Native Dancer" and "Exterminator" by Eva Jolene Boyd, and "Seabiscuit: An American Legend" by Laura Hillenbrand.

After seven years of in-depth research, Ours began the storytelling process of piecing her book together. In summer 2001, she started looking for an agent and soon met her mentor. "I found my agent, John Ware, through a directory," Ours said. "His insight as a former book editor helped me clarify what Man o' War should be about and improve my writing style. When the book proposal was finally ready, John sent it to about 18 publishers. St. Martin's Press was the only one who expressed serious interest—and I was delighted. I signed a contract with St. Martin's in 2004, and my book was officially released in May 2006."

"Once St. Martin's offered me the contract, it opened up the av-

enue of making some more research trips," Dorothy continued. "I revisited the Kentucky barns where Man o' War lived and returned to the Keeneland Library in Lexington, which is a huge resource for horse racing fans. I greatly enjoyed paging through the Daily Racing Forms from the 1919 and the '20s. I also visited the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which has a very rare resource called the Collyer's Eye sport sheet. It was published in the 19-teens through '30s and printed many industry rumors—some of which, like baseball's "Black Sox" scandal of 1919, were proven to be true. Some rumors can't be proven, but it still gives you a wonderful look at what a lot of people were thinking during this time period."

One of Ours' most memorable experiences was meeting a daughter-in-law of Man o' War's first jockey, Johnny Loftus. "She had scrapbooks from Johnny's career and was a priceless resource," said Dorothy. "A lot of people blame Johnny for Man o' War's one career loss, but when you really look at it, there were many other factors involved. Some clues from the scrapbooks pointed me in a very different direction!"

While her book is called Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning, Dorothy hopes that the story demonstrates that the immortal Man o' War was actually flesh and blood.

"Everyone knows that he was one of the greatest racehorses," said Dorothy. "But that's just it; he wasn't a machine, he was a horse. It's easy to lose sight of that."

At first, I was afraid that if I showed him in a realistic light, the reality of him not being invulnerable might disappoint some people. There were many times when Man o' War blew past his competition. But several times, he had to fight for victory. For me, that makes him even more likeable and admirable."

As much as the book is about

The writer, a resident of Stanhope, owns a Morgan mare. She is also the author of several children's novels, most recently Janie's New Legs and Luck of the Draw, which benefit local charities. She runs the Horse Welfare Organizations website at <http://horsewelfare.8k.com> and can be reached at lunar_aradia@yahoo.com.

Diana Tuorto

HUNTERDON HORSE BEAT



Author Dorothy Ours stands with Heyday Star Spangled Lady ("Libby"), one of her Morgan friends.

Man o' War himself, it also takes a closer look at the history of Thoroughbred racing and the people involved. "I think the book provides a life and times look at what racing struggled with during those years, as well as what its people went through," Dorothy added. "There's a lot about Man o' War as an individual, but the book explores the bigger picture as well."

One of the highlights of Ours' career took place during her book tour in 2006. "I visited various racetracks and had the chance to attend the 2006 Kentucky Derby," she said. "I went there with appreciation for Barbaro, but during the week before the race, I got to watch him work out and also relax around the barn. I completely fell for him. Even just walking around the shed row, he had such an intelligence and curiosity about him. Two days before the Derby, I felt as if he had to be the winner. After Barbaro was done galloping that morning, he jogged back with his feet barely touching the ground; he had so much flow and spirit, moving so effortlessly. I'm grateful that I got to see him up close. Many things about a horse don't always come across on TV."

Ours will be presenting her talk and slide show, "Man o' War Revisited," at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 30 at the main branch of the Hunterdon County Library at 314 Route 12 in Raritan Township. The presentation is free, but reservations are required.

For reservations or more information, call (908) 788-1434 or visit the events calendar at www.hclibrary.us.

For more information on Dorothy Ours or her book, Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning, please visit her Web site at www.dorothyours.com.

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