



The Pony Express

Editor: Sandy Zelmer
December, 2004

Send Information, Dates, or Classified Ads to the Editor at:

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Regional News:

Events with the dates and information on them can now be found at the following locations to avoid repetition. Check for dates you don't want to miss.

- ◆ For all Pony Club dates and results - Be sure to check the **WOR** website at <http://www.canadianponyclub.org/WesternOntario/index.htm> and the **CPC** website at <http://www.canadianponyclub.org/index.html> and especially the calendar there to be up to date!
- ◆ For all eventing and eventing clinic dates - <http://www.eventingincanada.com>
- ◆ The regional meeting dates for 2005 in Guelph have been set. We will have the use of two rooms at OVC's Life Learning Centre - #1713 and #1715. Remember that the January meeting will include a DC's workshop - we have a number of new DC's but experienced DC's may find it helpful, and their insights will be a valuable addition to the information to be shared.
- ◆ **Dates for 2005 Regional meetings:**

Date	Time	Activity
Sun., Jan. 16.	1:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting and DC/ADC Workshop
		Sr. Education - Linda Plank - Conditioning
Sun., Feb. 20	10:00 a.m.	PPG Workshop
	11:00 a.m.	Quiz Workshop
	1:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting
		Sr. Education - Wendy Johnson;
		Youth Representatives

Sun., Mar. 20	10:00 a.m.	Testing Workshop
	11:00 a.m.	Show Jumping/Dressage Workshop
	1:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting
		Sr. Educ. - Pat Frewen-Lord TD , Crawford Dales Scoring
Sun., Apr. 17	10:00 a.m.	A/B/C Rally Workshop
	11:00 a.m.	D Rally Workshop
	1:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting
		Sr. Education - TBA
Sat. May 7		Regional Quiz
Wed. May 18	7:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting
Wed. June 15	7:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting
Last Weekend in June		Regional Tetrathlon
Sat. July 9		Regional PPG
Sat. July 16		Regional Dressage and Show Jumping
Wed. July 20		Regional Meeting; Zone PPG
July 22 - 24		A/B/C Rally
Wed. Aug. 17		Regional Meeting
Aug. 20 - 21		Zone Dressage and Show Jumping
Sat. Aug. 27		D Rally

- ◆ Welcome to our newest branch - **The Westover Pony Club** - in the Dundas/Ancaster Area
- ◆ The **Regional High Point Branch Award** is calculated annually by Bob Simmons, one of our past Regional Chairs. The branches earning the most points at the various Regional events in 2005 were:
 - ◆ 1st - Grand River; 2nd - London; 3rd - Guelph; 4th - High County; 5th - Mt. Nemo
- ◆ Our **elected Regional Officers for 2005** are:

Chair	Catherine Miller
Vice-Chair	Darlene Haines
Secretary	Lani Harris
Treasurer	Tom Harris
Education	Norma Poel
Senior Testing	Susan Roth
Junior Testing	Pam Bechard
Quiz	
Tetrathlon	Warren & Donna Townsend
PPG	Kevin Kerr
Dressage	Darlene Haines & Sue Eagleson
Show Jumping	Lynn Morris & Sue Eagleson
A/B/C Rally	Lee Anne Bell
D Rally	Cathy Kelly
Membership	Crawford Dales
Communications/Newsletter	Sandy Zelmer
OEF	Anne Peace
National Director	Del Zelmer

Deputy Director

Catherine Miller

Visiting Commissioners

Virginia Buchanan-Smith; Ralph Rainford

- ◆ We still need to elect our two **Youth Representatives**. Branches, which have not yet done so are asked to submit, vote tallies for each of the three candidates (each member votes for 2). The candidates are:
 - Nikki Cowper - Guelph; Theresa Kerr - High County; Lauren Mark - WestoverTheir biographies have been circulated and the voting will close on Dec. 19/04
- ◆ Anne Peace would like to thank everyone who sent in his or her **OEF** proxy. She received nearly 40 in total from our Region. We were hoping to put 2 members on the **OEF board**, Virginia Buchanan-Smith, our past National Chair of Canadian Pony Club who is very familiar with the Board having been a past secretary on that board, and Cynthia Cowper to bring a voice from a Mother of a riding youth. Unfortunately 40 votes was not enough to be successful in this bid. Arthur Tateishi and Dr Mary Bell supported our efforts. Arthur is back on the board as is Sandra Sillcox. If you have any suggestions for the OEF to consider please pass them on to Anne Peace or Arthur. Next year the Ontario Pony Club must be more organized much earlier and get those proxies in so that we have a large number of votes and get a voice on the OEF Board for the grass roots of the riding industry - our Youth! Thank you to Anne Peace for your hard work and Thank you to Virginia and Cynthia for running for office.
- ◆ Western Ontario Region has an arranged with **Brubacher's Harness Shop** to receive a "bonus" of 10% of the value of all purchases and repairs for Pony Club members at either the Ailsa Craig or Wallenstein stores. We encourage all members to have a look at their catalogue: <http://www.brubachersharness.ca/Storefront/catalog/index.htm>
- ◆ Heads-Up - Canada is hosting the **InterPacific Rally in 2005**. Part of it will be held in Ontario (June 25-26th). Will need to borrow horses and billet the team.
- ◆ **Membership and Web Sites - Crawford Dales**
 - ◆ Memberships are due Jan 1 or before. Since everyone must be a member of both the CPC and OEF by Jan 1 in order to be involved in any Pony Club activities, there is no reason why the large majority of memberships should not be sent in before then.
 - ◆ 2004/2005 Western Ontario Region Fees - 1st member in family - \$85. 2nd member in family - \$65.
 - ◆ The CPC website use is up about 30% from last year and we will get between 240,000 and 250,000 visitors in 2004. Games are the most used section of the site with 140,000 plays during 2004.
 - ◆ The WOR section of the site is the second most used among the regions with only Central Ontario being used more. The most popular sections within WOR are the directions for how to get to places, event results, and the calendar.
 - ◆ In 2005, probably late in the year, we expect to add a capability for someone from each branch to update his or her own page on the website without having to know anything about constructing a web page.

WOR PLANNING MEETING- Catherine Miller, Chair, WOR

- ◆ The Regional Executive, Officers and Discipline Chairs of WOR held a brainstorming session to try and address a number of issues some of which affect the Region as a whole, and others which are more discipline specific. It was a broad ranging

discussion at which people seemed to feel free to express opinions and explore options from a number of different points of view. Although not many specific solutions were achieved, what seemed to emerge was a kind of consensus about the principles that could guide our actions and inform our decisions when specific concerns might arise. I was reminded of the theme of A/B/C Rally 3 years ago -

"Be Safe - Learn Something - Have Fun"

- ◆ 1. - We acknowledged that whether we like it or not, and even though it may feel uncomfortably restrictive at times, as responsible adults involved with an inherently dangerous activity in which our children participate, we must at all times emphasize and in fact insist upon the need for **safety**. The primary reason is of course to ensure as much as possible the well being of all our members. A secondary but important consideration is the risk of liability should we neglect to exercise due diligence. Thus when questions arise, perhaps the first "filter" should be "What are the safety implications?" Examples of where this will have significant impact are:
 - ◆ Testing standards - importance of training and supporting our examiners.
 - ◆ Eligibility to compete at Regional, National, International championships, including recognition of difference between test level as a minimum standard and higher competence required for competition levels; need for thoroughness in determining readiness for competition - DC responsibility must be taken seriously.
 - ◆ How to ensure safety of traveling teams - need for minimum of 2 adults regardless of size of team
- ◆ 2. - We must be mindful of the **principles and aims** of Pony Club - Loyalty, Character, and Sportsmanship - directed towards the development of strong, knowledgeable equestrians. A second filter would be "What will our members learn? How will this contribute to the growth of knowledge, ability, and character?" Examples of where this will have significant impact are:
 - ◆ Branch education programs - availability of Regional resources to support branch efforts, encourage inter-branch cooperation
 - ◆ An emphasis on participation first, before achievement, valuing effort and contribution ahead of competition.
 - ◆ Being alert to the need to educate and support volunteers as well as members
- ◆ 3. - **Having fun** - does not mean ignoring standards, safety, or abandoning our principles. When the work is shared, and our members are well prepared for their endeavors, fun is a natural byproduct of doing our best in what we love most - spending time with horses, ponies and like-minded friends. A third filter would be "How can we make what we do enjoyable for all participants, regardless of the personal outcome for any one individual?" Examples of where this consideration can have a significant impact are:
 - ◆ Appropriate recognition for efforts made and a variety of opportunities available for different levels of participation
 - ◆ Enhancing our organizational and management skills so that opportunities for cooperation and contribution are maximized and conflict is minimized

- ◆ Maintaining open lines of communication between and within levels of Pony Club structure
- ◆ Seek out, listen to, respect member input about what is important to them.
- ◆ This is a brief overview of the ideas and opinions that emerged from a thoughtful and lively exchange of WOR executive and discipline chairs. I believe it sets a constructive tone for our efforts in the coming year. I hope we will continue to work cooperatively in this way for the positive development of our organization - what is most gratifyingly clear to me is that everyone who participated was focused on the well-being and growth of our children in the very best tradition of Pony Club.
- ◆ **A shortage of qualified officials** is becoming a national problem. We should encourage our senior Pony Clubbers (and possibly some of our parents) to become officials and stewards. Equine Canada is looking into paying interested parties to become certified.
- ◆ Mike St. Denis (**Century Court Farm**) and Leonna Varga are putting together some events for next year. Tentative Dates are: March 19/20 - Dressage / Jumping Clinic with Mike St. Denis, April - Dressage Clinic (Date to be organized with guest clinician), May 28 - Schooling Jumper/ Equitation Show, June - Cross Country Clinic with Mike St. Denis (weekend to be determined), July 17- Combined Schooling Show, August 14 - Combined Schooling Show, September 25 - Combined Schooling Show, October 16 - Combined Schooling Show - Division Champion Awarded. For the Combined Shows we will have split by Juniors and Seniors/Open with Beginner, Pre-Entry, Entry and Pre-Training Divisions. Divisions champions will receive an award and a ribbon. For all the above dates pony club members will be offered a discount fee, about \$5-\$15 less than non-members. We were also thinking of opening the farm for other pony club events if there are any branches interested in using the facility. Please let them know if you think your Pony club branch would be interested. Of course they would also be looking for volunteers to help out at the shows, all volunteers would receive a free beverage and burger/hot dog voucher for the day of the show. Contact Leona Varga 519-824-4120 ext. 56246 or lvarga@uoguelph.ca
- ◆ **Is your news here? It could be, send stuff please!**

Classified Section:

- ◆ Classified are **free** to all pony clubbers, and for things that would interest pony clubbers.
- ◆ PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHEN YOUR ITEMS SELL SO I CAN DELETE YOUR AD!!!!!!!!!!!!!! THANKS. If I deleted your ad because I haven't heard from you and you need it back in, please let me know and I will put it back in.

Horses and Ponies

- ◆ **18 month old Hanoverian** - Verband branded very pretty chestnut filly, beautiful temperment, well handled and affectionate - looking for her perfect owner - will turn

heads in the show ring. For more info call Simone Usselman-Tod at 905-627-6797 or e mail sandylane@golden.net

- ◆ **Sparky** - 5 year old, appaloosa gelding. Has evented, would make a great horse for a C level rider. Needs someone willing to work on groundwork for him to reach his full potential. Bold, honest talented jumper. Potential to go Prelim., 15.1 hh, up to date on shots, worming. Trailers, clips, bathes, sound. Great on trails, road safe. Pictures can be seen at www.digipics.ws under ABC Pony Club, page 8, IMG 6089, 6090, 6091, 6092, 6093 (Spark In The Dark). Contact Carol at horsinaround@bellnet.ca. Asking \$4000.
- ◆ **Feature Presentation (Kenya)** - Home bred May 2000, 16.1-hand bay Canadian Sport Horse mare. Dam - Main Attraction, a Clydesdale cross mare that evented at the Pre-Training level but schooled all the Training level fences, jumped 4 foot stadium and sold as a Field Hunter where she is still doing well. Sire - TB, Tejabo, by Deputy Minister, who was also the sire of Prelim eventer Piece of the Puzzle, a winning Young Riders Team Horse and winner of the 2002 Ontario Horse Trials Assn. High Point Ontario Preliminary Young Rider Championship. Kenya was green broke and bred as a 3 yr old, has a lovely 2004 filly which placed 5th in the line classes at the Royal last month. Kenya was not bred back, as she needs to have her own career. She has successfully shown low Hunter at our local schooling shows, and evented twice this year as a four yr old, at the 2'6 level, placing with a very novice rider. She is totally sound, has no vices, loads easily, ties to the fence or trailer, baths, is easy to catch, likes people and has a friendly disposition. \$5,000. Sandy Zelmer, 905-936-2658, szelmer@parklaneranch.ca (her 2004 filly by Yellow Creek is also for sale - \$5,000.)
- ◆ **MAN O WAR PROGENY - ROYAL FASHION**. He is 16 hands, 11 year old chestnut gelding, 3 white stockings, blaze, Big movement, Excellent barn manners, Trailers like a pro, Never on the forehand, very agile with lots of suspension, Trained in basic dressage, started in Basic 11, One owner for 11 years. Royal Fashion will make an excellent dressage horse with amazing presence, Bred for jumping, but has been trained in dressage. BLOODLINES: Dam: Royal Jewel Fate, C. S. H., proven broodmare, Always in the ribbons in Hunter & Jumper, won at 3-Day events at Preliminary Level, Cleared 5 ft. fences even at 18 years of age, bred from dressage & jumping bloodlines, Royal Jewel's dam, Coppertone, was a great granddaughter, of MAN O WAR, and ½ sister to the horse REGARDÉZ, a horse ridden by Jim Elder in the 1976 Olympics. Sire: Medieval Fashion, registered T.B. son of Medieval Man, Black Type, track record holder (distance) in U.S.A., lifetime earnings of over \$200,000, 24 years old & still going strong, CALL DENISE STEWART at (705 782-0496), ASKING \$15,000.
- ◆ **El Gran Phillip** - 15.3 hand black thoroughbred gelding, rising 4 yr old. No one told him he was supposed to be a racehorse so he would rather be someone's pleasure horse. Very kind and loving, had a curb on his hocks cryoed, traveling totally sound now, but he has some race track wear and tear so likely not a top eventing or jumping prospect. \$1200. szelmer@sympatico.ca 905-936-2658.
- ◆ **Bobby** - Six-year-old (January 1998) German bred pony, bay gelding 14.1hh. Bobby rides like a horse, has a big step, and is brave and bold to the jumps. He showed in Germany as a 4 year old with an 11 year old rider in both Dressage and Jumper classes. He schools 3ft to 3ft6 at home with ease. Fast and careful, he will make a kid a star in the

pony jumper ring. His canter is so smooth he could be used for the pony medals as well. Champion at Canadian schooling show at Hendervale in 3'0 3'3 div. \$25,000. Contact Brad Gabriel 1 (905) 379-7433.

- ◆ **Miss Priss** - 5 year old 13 hh, round pony mare. Priss loves to play PPG games and can jump a 2'9 course. She's a great spunky pony that loves to work. \$1800.00 Check out photos at www.jewelsridingacademy.ca or call Lori 519-843-9987
- ◆ **Shine** - Gorgeous black and white pinto mare. 5 year old, 15h, was ridden all summer by a 6 year old. She's just learning to jump (2'6"). \$4000. Check her out on www.jewelsridingacademy.ca or call Lori 519-843-9987
- ◆ **Weanling pony foals** - Paint/Welsh cross, will mature to Large and Medium ponies, \$500 each, contact Gabrielle Monteith at gmonteit@ovc.uoguelph.ca
- ◆ **Weanling CSHA fillies** - by Yellow Creek, all bred to perform, blacks and bays starting at \$3500. Szelmer@sympatico.ca 905-936-2658, www.parklaneranch.ca
- ◆ **Cameo** - 2001 bay filly by TB/CSH by "Yellow Creek" out of registered Clydesdale mare. She will be a big girl, well over 16 hands, closer to 17 hands, Eventer? Field hunter? Pony Club? can be registered half Sport Horse. \$4,000, contact Clay or Carolyn at 905-936-5136
- ◆ **Appollo** - 2000 Clyde/TB cross bay gelding with lots of white, very attractive! Sound, friendly, broke to ride, 17.1 hands and growing, a big boy! And very quiet. \$10,000, contact Clay or Carolyn at 905-936-5136.
- ◆ **Easy girl at the bar (Small Town Girl), (Kahlua)** - registered AQHA mare bred in Texas. Brown, 14.1 hands, 16 years old, has had several foals. She is confirmed in foal to a black Paint stallion "Wash My Socks", live foal guaranteed. Shown as Small Town Girl, this mare has numerous hunter, jumper, games, PPG, and Tetrathlon Championships, and has been used many times for National and International PPG and Tetrathlon. She schooled Prelim cross-country with ease. She is no longer totally sound if worked hard and jumped, so is best for pleasure and breeding due to arthritic ankles. I see many Champion hunter and jumper ponies, Paint, or AQHA horses ahead in her breeding career. She is an active fun ride and sound for occasional rides or shows. She loves to go and is not beginner quiet. Great broodmare or a great back-up horse for Pony Club or eventing where she only has to work occasionally. In 2004 she was 4th at both Caledon and Equus 3D Events at the 2'6" level, and did well at 5 hunter shows, taking the Novice Hunter over Fences Challenge Trophy at year end. She wasn't worked regularly and stayed totally sound. She is a horse you can save her legs to just get on and go to a show with out much riding in between. \$3500 LFG to a good home only, she was (and still is) my daughter's baby but she can't keep them all. With care she may stay sound for consistent work but we sell them honest. szelmer@sympatico.ca 905-936-2658

Wanted

- ◆ **Searching for a Pony** - Must be quiet and good natured. Will gladly consider a pony that is ready for a life of blissful retirement with light riding only. 819-682-0620 Alexis
- ◆ **Looking for a Horse** - looking to purchase an older horse, 10-15 years old, 15-16HH. Horse needs to be safe & sound. This horse will be used mainly for trail riding (English).

There is no intention of showing or jumping. Michelle Bussey @ 519-648-3403 or email Michelle at rbusse@on.aibn.com

- ◆ **Wanted - 15.2 to 16.2 hand, 4 to 16 yr old mare or gelding**, sound, for C rider, also going to event Entry level (2'9"), maximum \$2000 to spend. Please call my coach, Sue Boyle at 905-936-2658. And tell her it is for Molly

Tack and Equipment

- ◆ I have a pair of size 7, normal calf, **English leather field boots** for sale. They are in really good condition. I am interested in selling them for \$150. Contact me at gap_princess15@hotmail.com. Laura Hastings
- ◆ **4 horse stock trailer** built 2 years ago, gooseneck, hauls great, very good condition. \$6000. phone 519 846-8466 or e mail tomradcliffe@yahoo.com
- ◆ **Crosby 16" close contact saddle**, excellent condition, no scratches, stains, \$750 obo, eventerbabe16@hotmail.com 416-236-7190 ask for Molly
- ◆ **4-horse gooseneck trailer** for sale. Custom built by Tracer (USA Company) to be flexible. All the interior partitions come in and out easily. You can have one large space (great for hauling jumps and things), or 2 huge box stalls well separated (great for mares and colts, we used one for the stallion) or both box stalls make into 2 large trailer stalls for a total of 4 large individual stalls. Suitable for big horses, we hauled 16.3 and 17 hand horses with lots of room, has 2 ramps, one at the back and one at the side, escape door, mats, and is black with a red stripe. Sells certified \$8000 obo. Sandy Zelmer at 905-936-2658 or szelmer@sympatico.ca
- ◆ **Quality jumps** for sale. Brand new. Painted or unpainted. Great prices. Variety of jumps available as well as custom design. idealjumps@sympatico.ca
- ◆ **Tipperary Vests**, Tall-Medium, white, cover comes off for easy washing, brand new, \$100. equus3d@ican.net

Services, Shows, Clinics, and other

- ◆ **Free Board for your horse:** - University of Western Ontario/Fanshawe College students London area. Free board for your horse in return for 4-5 days cleaning out stalls. Approximately 12-14 stalls (1 - 1 1/2 hrs work). In return you get full board, small indoor arena, large outdoor arena, trails and lots of Pony Club kids to ride with. Please call Diane for more information 519-283-9678 or email dianne.jackson@jus.gov.on.ca
- ◆ **Boarding Available:** - Ten minutes from Mohawk. Large, safe, grassy paddocks. Oak stalls also available in large, clean barn. New 150 x 210 sand ring, fully fenced. Perfect environment for a young person in training. Coaching available. Pony part boarding an option. \$150 for pasture board, \$250 for full board. 519-821-1553 Vicki Dickson
- ◆ **Standing at stud: Yellow Creek** - 16.3 hand homozygous black TB stallion, Bronze Premium Sport Horse, Approved AQHA www.parklaneranch.ca

Editorials, jokes, other things worth reading

I got two Christmas stories so here are both! Second one is long but I like it.

A HORSEMAN'S CHRISTMAS - by horse trainer Doris Eraldi

It's the night before Christmas, we're out in the barn
Blanketing horses to keep them all warm
They're eating their dinners, tucked in cozy stalls
Not aware that it's Christmas or any special day at all

>

They can dream of spring pastures from their pine-scented beds
No visions of sugarplums dance in their heads
But we people are thinking of merry parties and such
Maybe feeling a little sad at missing so much

>

This season is special but the horses don't know
We've got work to do before we can go
We finish the chores and head on inside
To get ready for dinner and our own yuletide

>

>It's nearly midnight, the carols are sung
I remember a story I was told when I was young
How at midnight on Christmas Eve
The creatures of the barnyard can speak to us with ease

>

I am called to the barn, I wade through the rain
I know I must go, I can't really explain
I slide open the door, pause for a while
Then slowly walk down that dimly lit aisle

>

A nicker from Casey, a wink from JD
Sleepy old Alibi waking to see
Tucker rustling his bedding, a snort soft and light
Each horse gave a greeting as I walked through the night

>

I thought about parties bright lit and warm
The ones we don't go to 'cause we have the barn
And vacations and holidays that we don't get
When we're working long hours for bills to be met

>

Walking all the way to the end of the aisle
I stop to stroke Bonnie, it brings me a smile
She snuffles my face, hot breath on my skin
It starts me to thinking about my horses, my kin

>

I could be at parties with laughter and mirth
But where I am right now is the best place on Earth.

A Horse's Christmas Fable

The old gray horse sidled up to the pasture fence with little dancing steps. The place seemed familiar, yet somehow strange. The grass was greener than any grass he'd ever seen, and when he looked closely at the white paddock gate it had a kind of pearly sheen. And there was another funny thing. A big, black cloud hovered just inside the gate. The cloud wasn't up in the sky where it properly belonged. It was like a great puff of black smoke rising from the grass. Suddenly the cloud dissolved and revealed a horse. He was a small chestnut with a blunt head and one white stocking and brownish hair in his tail and mane. The gray horse thought he had a kind of old timely look to him.

"Hello, old gray horse," the chestnut from the black cloud said. "Hey, that's a real good trick!" the gray horse exclaimed. "Where'd you learn it?" The chestnut disappeared into the cloud again, but emerged immediately. "Learned it the day I was born," he replied, with a whinny that sounded like a chuckle. "You see, I was born on April Fool's Day and there was a total eclipse of the sun. So they named me Eclipse. I was always playing tricks on people too. Used to kick my grooms and try to throw my riders and I bit the auctioneer that sold me."

"My name is..." the old gray horse started to say politely, but the tricky chestnut ducked in and out of his cloud and interrupted rudely. "Native Dancer," he said. "I ought to know you. I'm your great-great-great-great-great - I always lose count of the 'greats' - but anyway, you're a descendant of mine, almost everybody is, in fact. The Thoroughbreds, that is."

"Are you the gatekeeper?" Native Dancer asked. "Mostly," Eclipse replied. "I'm on duty whenever one of my descendants is coming up. That's mostly so far as the Thoroughbreds go. Old Matchem has a few left, and he takes over when one's due. And poor old Herod, he's posted here occasionally, but there's not many of his male line that aren't here already."

"What is this place" Native Dancer asked. "I guess I'm kind of lost." "The Green Place," Eclipse replied. "That's what it's called. The Green Place. Most of the horses that get lost come here. We have to send some back of course." "Why?" the Dancer asked. "Because they don't belong here, that's why. Long before I came up there was this fellow Bayard, for instance. He was a devil-horse. Belonged to an old necromancer named Malagigi and he did the devil's work. Helped that villain Aymon of Dordogne to triumph over Charlemagne, they say, and a wizard named Michael Scott had a big black beast who used to stomp his feet and set all the bells of Paris ringing. He even caused the towers of the palace to fall down one day. The Big Guy doesn't want that kind here. But we have Jesse James' horse, and Dick Turpin's too. The Big Guy says they did nothing wrong themselves. They were just faithful to their masters, and The Big Guy thinks that's a virtue."

"Who's the Big Guy?" Native Dancer asked. "You'll find out!" Eclipse answered airily. He lowered his muzzle and pushed the gate open. "You might as well come in. You understand you're on probation though. The Big Guy makes his decisions about new arrivals every Christmas. Let's see, it's November 16, the way you figure things down there. So you won't have long to wait anyway."

"I'll bet The Big Guy is Man O' War" Native Dancer said as he moved inside and gazed over the emerald green expanses that seemed to stretch into infinity. Eclipse snorted. "Don't get smart, boy" he said. Then he added maliciously, "You'd lose your bet too, the way a lot of people lost their bets on you at Churchill Downs one day." Native Dancer felt hurt, for his ancestor had touched a raw nerve. His lip tremble a bit as he replied defensively, "That Derby was the only race I ever lost." "I never lost even one race," Eclipse said unsympathetically. "So don't get smart up here. The Big Guy doesn't want any smart-alecks in the Green Place. Remember that."

Native Dancer was a sensitive sort. He felt as if his eyes were teary and he hoped Eclipse didn't notice. "I won 21 out of 22, and Man O' War only won 20 out of 21" he declared. "And my son Kauai King won the Kentucky Derby."

"My sons won three Derbys at Epsom" Eclipse said. "Young Eclipse took the second running and Saltram won the fourth and Sergeant won the fifth, and I'd have won the bloomin' race myself, only they didn't run it in my time. So quit bragging. Somebody's coming and they might overhear you and tell The Big Guy, and that would be a mark against you."

A bay horse who seemed even more old-timey than Eclipse ambled up. "Is it my time now?" he asked eagerly. "Not yet, Herod," Eclipse answered in a kindly fashion. "Old Fig's on duty now. One of his is on the way." "Who's Old Fig?" Native Dancer asked. "I never heard of that one." "There's a lot of things you never heard of, boy," Eclipse replied. "His real name is Figure, but down there they called him Justin Morgan, after his owner. Here he is now." A very small, dark bay horse with a round barrel, tiny feet, and furry fetlocks came bustling up to the gate. "OK, OK, I'll take over," he said busily. "Where is that boy? Can't stand tardiness. I've got things to do. A load to pull, a field to plough, a race to run, a trot to trot. No time to waste. Where is that boy?"

In the weeks that followed, The Dancer met hundreds, maybe thousands, of horses. Some of them were famous, and some of them were his ancestors and a few of them were his own sons and daughters. He met a snorting white stallion named Bucephalus who had been approved for the Green Place by the Big Guy even though he was rumored by some that he was cursed by the deadly sin of pride because he had carried a conqueror named Alexander.

He met another gray horse who limped because he had stepped on a rusty nail back home just before he became lost forever. His name was Traveller, and he was a war-horse too, in the days when a man named General Lee had owned him. There were other soldier steeds, two of them descendants of the bustling little stallion they called Old Fig up here. One was

Phil Sheridan's black Rienzi and the other horse called both Fancy and Little Sorrel who had been the mount of Stonewall Jackson.

Native Dancer found Man O' War an amiable sort despite his proud aristocratic bearing, and he grew especially fond of a bony old fellow named Exterminator, who patiently answered all but one of his questions. He asked the question of everyone: "Who is The Big Guy?" And the answer was always the same: "Wait 'til Christmas."

He met Messenger and Hambletonian and Hindoo. He met horses that had dared the dreadful fences of the Grand National. He met a horse who stared blindly into the emerald darkness. His name was Lexington. He met horses who had pulled circus wagons and horses who had pulled brewers' trucks and horses who had drawn man's plows over the fields of earth, and he met others who had been the mounts of kings and captains. Always the answer to his question was the same: "Wait 'til Christmas."

Eclipse fussed over him and kept a watchful eye on his behavior and said he neighed too much and asked too many questions. Eclipse could not stand the thought of The Big Guy banishing one of his descendants from the Green Place. And Native Dancer did not wish to leave. He doubted he could ever find his way to Maryland again if The Big Guy disapproved of him. And the Green Place was very pleasant in all respects. The grass was lush and he met so many interesting horses. Back home he had sometimes been troubled by nightmares, for a Dark Star haunted his dreams, but now he slept peacefully and rarely remembered the Derby he had lost. He became nervous though, as the weeks went by and the stars grew brighter.

And finally it was time. On a night when the skies burned with starlight all the horses gathered as near as possible to a little hillock of the vast paddock. There were hundreds, thousands, maybe millions of them, a murmuring and expectant throng that seemed to stretch over the emerald grass beneath the diamonds in the heavens. Eclipse was very tense. He hovered over Native Dancer, whispering, "Look your best now. Be quiet and humble. The Big Guy will be here any minute."

Suddenly the vast throng was silent as the stars themselves. The Big Guy stood on the hillock in a blinding blaze of starlight, and Native Dancer could barely contain himself. He choked back a whinny of derision and whispered to Eclipse, "Is he The Big Guy? He's so little! And he's not even a horse! What did he ever do?"

Eclipse whispered, "He's a donkey. He carried a woman heavy with child to a small town on another night when the stars were bright. It was a long, long time ago."

Merry Christmas!