

# FIFTY-SEVEN TIMES AROUND THE TRACK

MICHAEL BROHM AND THE RUN FOR THE ROSES



The weatherman had predicted the wettest Kentucky Derby since 1918. Five inches of rain was possible. But, as the twenty horses made their way onto the track for the 136th running, sunshine burst through the clouds like light through a prism. As the crowd of 155,000 rose to their feet to sing "Oh, the Sun Shines Bright on my Old Kentucky Home", the sun did its part. It was beautiful.

The Derby on May 1st was my 57th Derby. In Louisville, Derby Day is as much a part of the local calendar as Christmas. Children are conceived on this first Saturday in May. Dogs are lost. Cats are found. It marks the day that gardening can begin, without the threat of frost. The "before Derby" or "after Derby" line of demarcation is well established.

I recall Derby Day as a child, growing up in the West End of Louisville. The neighborhood was a grid of small frame houses packed with churchgoing Catholic families with lots of kids. In preparation for the day, lawns had been mowed, hedges trimmed, cars washed, porches swept. Folding tables had been carted from the garage and covered with freshly ironed tablecloths. Glass pitchers full of lemonade, iced tea and Kool-Aid were brought from the kitchen.

The adults were on the front porch with the newspaper spread out, post positions and betting strategies being discussed. Copying from the newspaper, I would carefully print the name of each horse on a small strip of white paper, fold it and drop it into a coffee can. Proudly, I would walk house to house where neighbors would drop a quarter into the can and pull out their horse. I loved walking around with that can full of quarters but didn't like having to give the winner his money.

We didn't yet own a TV and would listen throughout the day to the radio-WHAS 840... 50,000 watts, clear channel (Which now has sadly succumbed to the ranting of Rush Limbaugh and Fox's "news".)

I only went to the track on Derby Day a couple of times as a child. Even then, Churchill Downs was a beautiful old relic. All freshly painted in bright white and green, the layers of paint so thick it was like an archeological dig. The shouting voices of the mint julep and racing form vendors echoed off of the smoothly worn herringbone patterned bricks. The smell was of bourbon, cigar, cologne, dirt and horse. I held hands with my grandparents as we walked with the loud, excited crowd through the tunnel under the track to the infield. The infield was a beautiful green lawn, packed everywhere with people. An elderly black couple sat on wooden folding chairs, the gentleman in a crisp white linen suit and straw hat, the lady in a full dress, huge Sunday hat, holding a red umbrella with little gold tassels. People were drinking something out of brown paper bags. I had a coke. In the distance I could hear the people in the grandstand, nestled between the famous Twin Spires, making the low, happy murmur of money and privilege.

My college was only a few blocks from the track. During the week before the race a tent city would form in the sports fields on campus. Students from all over the country came for the all night music, dancing, sex, cheap beer, Boone's Farm "wine" and as much illegal stuff as one could ingest. It was the early 1970s. As early as the neurons could begin firing on Derby morning, the tents and sleeping

bags were rolled up and the exodus to the track would begin.

The streets around the track were filled with entrepreneurs for the day. This was their payday. Once a year, unsuspecting crowds with pockets full of cash would need their services. Front yards, side yards, backyards... anyplace a car would fit, had been cleared to park cars. Everyone had a sign advertising their parking... the price escalating as you got closer to the track. If the deal was reached, the entrepreneur would sit on the hood of the car directing the driver to his special place. All manners of everything was for sale. You could show up in your underwear and in a few short blocks be totally outfitted in Derby regalia.

Carrying your own liquor into the track was not permitted. Therefore, all kinds of thoughtful, mysterious ways had to be devised to get your stuff past security. Hard liquor became the choice, especially clear liquors like vodka and gin, with the occasional tequila. Loaves of bread were hollowed out to hold a fifth. Bras were teamed with baggies to bring in the goods. The bigger the bra, the bigger the payload, in more ways than one. Coolers full of ice would become one huge martini, the liquor poured directly in, later to be drunk directly from the cooler. I don't recall any olives or vermouth. A sad groan would come from the crowd at the gate as someone's liquor was discovered and thrown crashing to the bottom of a dumpster. Others just stopped before going in and took care of a day's worth of drinking, right then and there. Neat.

After college, and for the next 25 Derbys or so, I went as a working photojournalist. With a press pass around my neck, I could go anywhere.

How about lunch with Charles Kuralt? (ok, in the same room). Want to see the Queen of England? Let's go find Muhammad Ali. Maybe a quick trip to the infield to see if the girls are topless yet. Oh, and let's go see Secretariat, I hear he's pretty good and I haven't photographed a horse yet.

I had the best seat in the house, on a twelve foot ladder next to the winner's circle. Beautiful.

Nowadays I watch the race on big flat TV. I go to a raucous party with a bartender and a band. This year I wore a yellow plaid thrift store sports coat and my grandmother's straw hat with a horse on top. We still do a version of the coffee can bookie, only now it's tallied on an iPad. I still get a truly wonderful feeling, as all Kentuckians must do, when the horses make it to the track and we all stand and sing Stephen Foster's ode to beauty, My Old Kentucky Home.

There are few events in the world that draw such a wide cross section of humanity as the Derby. It's Hollywood, Nascar, NFL, Nashville, LA, NYC, Rio, poor white trash, hip-hop, and London all pushed cheek by jowl with Madge and Ed from Peoria. Without sounding all chamber of commerce, this is an event that you should come see once in your lifetime. Where else can you wear a pink seersucker suit and feel good about it?

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Also visit Michael's Perm, Russia site: <http://www.blurb.com/books/1345101>

**THE BACKBONE #28**



**These are the noble BACKBONE members who didn't send a photo. But I am standing by ...pen in hand...JS**

Richard Helmke...  
Glenwood Springs, CO  
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Steve Urycki...Cuyahoga Falls, OH  
Mary Anne Hoover, Ogden, UT  
Mark & Karen Galleger  
Clarke Abbey...Moab, UT  
Meg Dellenbaugh...NY, NY  
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Dick & Gina Lee...Buena Vista, CO  
The Unknown InnKeeper...Utah  
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Dennis Demots...Oakdale, CT

Pinar Ozhal...Seattle, WA  
Doug Fix...Moab, UT  
Linda McCracken...Westport, CT  
Mary & Doug Steinbauer  
(The Fordbanks!)...NY,NY  
John Brasch, Louisville, KY  
Michaelene Pendleton, Moab,  
Kevin Hedrick, Allston, MA  
Michael Kossow..Taylorsville, CA  
Janet Walther...San Diego, CA  
David McCargo...Anchorage, AK

# THE FOOTPRINTS Top 10 List

121 East 100 South...Moab, Utah 84532

**TOP 10 WAYS TO REDUCE POLITICAL POLARIZATION**

10. Anyone running for political office will be required to demonstrate and prove above average IQ.
9. While on the floor, politicians shall wear shock collars that will deliver the results of feedback from CSPAN viewers.
8. All interactions with lobbyists will be uploaded to YouTube.
7. At the end of each speech, Democrats are to bray like a donkey and Republicans must bellow like an elephant in heat.
6. Political salaries will be limited to the same wages and medical benefits offered by fast food restaurants in their home towns.
5. Each member of Congress will be required to tell a dirty joke before addressing the House or the Senate.
4. Democrats may only watch Fox News. Republicans may only watch the Daily Show with Jon Stewart.
3. Prior to speaking, congressmen (or women) will be required to publicly and literally kiss the ass of anyone they intend to impugn. (See #2 and #1.)
2. Before a filibuster, all legislators will be required to drink two pints of beer and eat two bean and jalapeno burritos.
1. Congress will convene and conduct all its business in the nude. (Wearing Depend® diapers allowed.)



Please read The Zephyr or I'll poke you in the eye with this pitchfork...

Thank you.

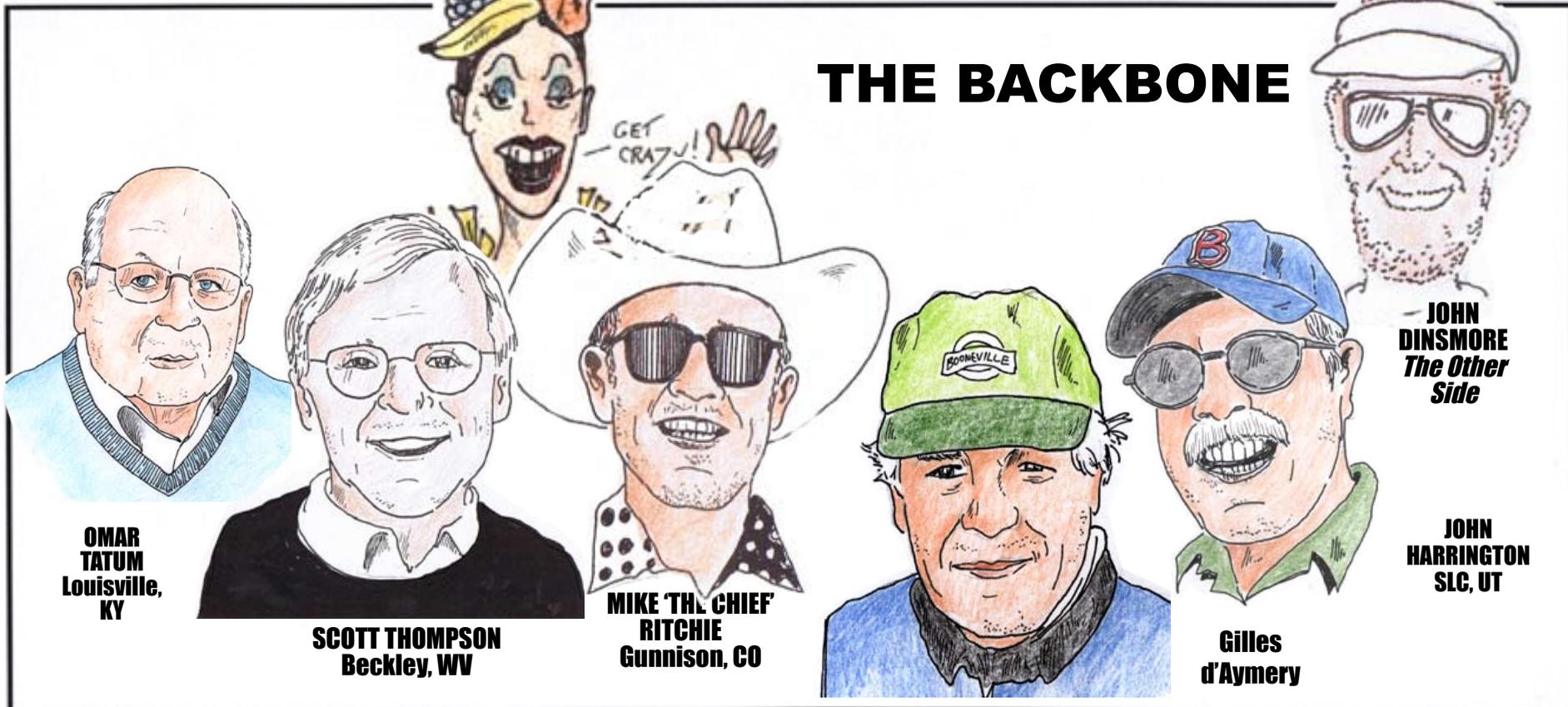
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