

(Continued from the previous post)

### **Even Farther from the Madding . . .**

Foxhunting also permitted me an opportunity to gain some insight into my future students' psyches. After college and before I assumed my role as a ne'er-do-well dressage instructor, I did a stint as a naval officer. This was during those Vietnam years, and it seemed far wiser to spend them in a wardroom eating ice cream than hunkering down in some rice paddy eating bugs. I had gone out on a limb at the time I was to be assigned to a billet and had asked for "the biggest ship that you have that's homeported on the east coast and never goes anywhere." Apparently no one had ever made that request before. They put me on a missile cruiser that was on its way into drydock for a year in Boston—tough duty! The offshoot of all this was that I was able to commute to my ship from a rural apartment and to ride every afternoon after work.

One night before the annual Columbus Day hunt, I had had to stay aboard ship to stand watch. I was to get off duty at oh eight hundred, drive like a maniac 75 miles, and catch up with my horse at the meet. The logistics were very tight, so I had changed into my formal attire—boots, breeches, stock tie, melton coat, *et.al.*—before I left. Then I had to march off the brow and down the entire length of the pier enduring the hoots and catcalls of all the shipyard workers who clearly had honed their techniques practicing sexual harassment on the fair sex. For that seemingly endless walk, I felt as a woman must in so many uncomfortable circumstances.

OK, one last hunting story and then back to real, *i.e.*: compulsively-driven, riding. When I was learning to ride and hunt, one of the older members was a bit of a prankster. On winter hunts he loved to gallop along, reach up, and shake an overhead pine bough so that it would deposit its snowy load onto the rider following directly behind. Mr. Iverson lacked a bit of couth. I soon learned it was unwise to ride behind him for another reason. As he rode, he would unselfconsciously launch an occasional snot rocket to clear out his pipes. An alert follower would know to duck left or right to avoid these missiles, hoping that if you were unsuccessful, they might at least have frozen by the time they hit you.

Mr. Iverson was also a Shriner (yeah, can't place the name but the fez is familiar) and he used his hunting horse to ride quadrille exhibitions over fences. The highlight of their show was when kerosene-soaked metal arches over the obstacles were ignited, and they jumped in formation through the flames. We could always tell when Mr. Iverson had been performing because he would appear in the hunt field with his horse's tail frizzled and singed very short.

It is said that cross country riding builds certain character traits in horses—among them initiative and self-reliance. Occasionally, by necessity, these carry over to the rider. Before I succumbed to serious dressage, I did a lot of lower level eventing. We competed at many of the recognized horse trials around New England, but once I naively entered an unsanctioned horse trial I wasn't familiar with. And, as a result, I was introduced first-hand to the term "leaky roof." To be fair, the organizers were trying to put on a nice event. They just didn't have much to work with, and their attitude was several orders of magnitude more relaxed than I was used to. Case in point: as I was

walking the cross country course, map in hand, I discovered the route took us into a small pasture where we were to make a 180 and jump back out a little farther down the fence line. Comfortably nestled around the base of this second jump was a small flock of sheep. Not one to take things for granted (you can see how I gravitated to dressage), I asked the organizers what they were going to do with them.

“Oh, not anything,” was the reply. “Sheep’ll move when you gallop at them.”

My horse was pretty green, and this just didn’t sound like a viable solution, so I rode the course with a handful of rocks in my pocket. Jumping into the field, I was prepared to scatter the sheep with a well-aimed heave, make my ewe turn (sorry), and continue on course. And that is what I did!