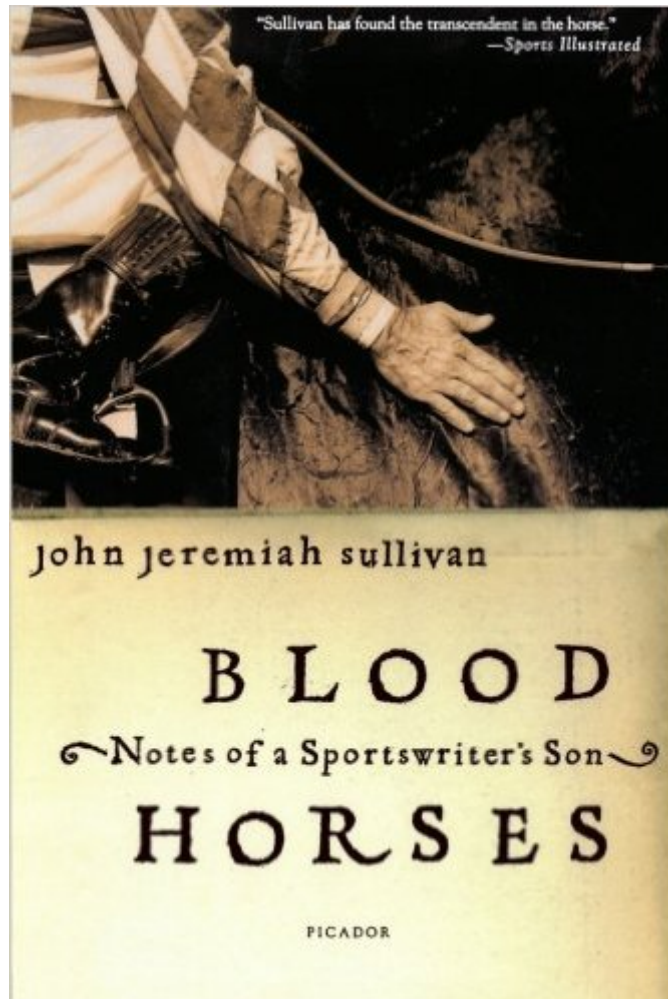


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Blood Horses: Notes Of A Sportswriter's Son



Synopsis

"Sullivan has found the transcendent in the horse."--Sports Illustrated Winner of a 2004 Whiting Writers' Award One evening late in his life, veteran sportswriter Mike Sullivan was asked by his son what he remembered best from his three decades in the press box. The answer came as a surprise. "I was at Secretariat's Derby, in '73. That was ... just beauty, you know?" John Jeremiah Sullivan didn't know, not really-but he spent two years finding out, journeying from prehistoric caves to the Kentucky Derby in pursuit of what Edwin Muir called "our long-lost archaic companionship" with the horse. The result-winner of a National Magazine Award and named a Book of the Year by The Economist magazine-is an unprecedented look at Equus caballus, incorporating elements of memoir, reportage, and the picture gallery. In the words of the New York Review of Books, Blood Horses "reads like Moby-Dick as edited by F. Scott Fitzgerald . . . Sullivan is an original and greatly gifted writer."

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Customer Reviews

Here's the long and short of it: John Jeremiah Sullivan, straight out of the gate with BLOOD HORSES, his first book, has written a masterpiece. Mixing conventional memoir, unconventional reportage, and a collage of historical source material about the history of the horse and the horse in history and literature, Sullivan braids apparently disparate strands into a single narrative of power, delicacy, strangeness, and beauty. And as smart as this book is, as much reading and thinking as Sullivan slips into every page, there is never a moment when the enterprise has even a hint of

pretention. This is a function of Sullivan's deep storytelling reserves, his elegant prose, his biting sense of humor (particularly about his own shortcomings), and his huge heart that, like Seabiscuit's own, is preternaturally large. Sullivan's book is ultimately a moving tribute to his father—a failed poet, a respected sportswriter, and a man Sullivan lost too soon. Sullivan searches high and low for traces of him, a search that yields this book, one of the most moving and accomplished in recent memory, a book built to last.

I first came across the article gleaned from the pages of this book (or in preparation of...) in a 2003 Harper's Magazine, October, I think. Mr. Sullivan's walk through the bizarre intricacies of the horse racing world from all sides, including his most personal, were raw genius. He nonchalantly drew connections between more humble pedigrees (his own, for example - nothing remarkable except that it, too, is now published) and those of these rarified creatures (thoroughbreds) in a way I didn't even notice until half way through. What a respectful tribute to his father. It seemed to me a sort of a come from behind type of writing style that crystalized into a fine read somewhere in the middle, and then just got better. All the way to the very last sentence.

Somewhat in the discursive style of W.G. Sebald, the author of this wonderful book wanders easily from a discussion of the role of horses during the ice age to the lyrics of My Olde Kentucky Home, to the way that jockeys grasp their whips, taking in along the way a search for a lost pony and a visit to the Kentucky yearling sales. But this book is more than a ramble through horse country. Running like another theme throughout are the author's memories, sometimes wildly funny, sometimes poignant, of his sportswriter father and the love that kept them apart. It is this apposition of the discursive and the intensely personal that gives the book its magic and makes John Jeremiah Sullivan a new author to applaud.

This is a breath-taking book. I picked it up at the library, thinking it was about race horses. It's not, really. But I'm buying for my own, anyway. The horses are in there, with tales of Secretariat and War Emblem, horses carrying soldiers to war, hobby-horses, and the bond between humans and horses. But not in the way you expect. This is a story about a sportswriter father, written by his son. But it's more than that. It's about being at the Keeneland yearling sale on September 10 and 11th 2001. It's about hearing his father's story of the 1973 Triple Crown races and the man as a boy sitting in the press box after a baseball game watching his father interact with his fellow newspapermen. It's about that moment in your life when you first see the human being, not the parent, and coming to

terms with it. And a lot of other stuff that is hard to explain but makes perfect sense as you read it. It roams from Woodstock, to 1830's Germany, to the 1800's journal of a Kentucky itinerate well-digger, to the 2003 Belmont Stakes and ends in a way that is a perfect tribute in so many ways you have to have read it for me to explain it. The last time I was so taken by a book was John Irving's *The World According to Garp*. But this is real life, and it tastes of it. Buy it if you are interested in horses - or in humans. Or in both.

After hearing the author read at a book signing at our local bookstore, I went home and started the book. I could not put it down! A beautifully written, powerful book written with scholarship, conviction and courage. If you have not found this book yet, you must! It is an exceptional read!

This book is amazing. It is deeply informative on the history and beauty of horseracing, all the while weaving an intricate web of storytelling between seemingly different topics. In the author's personal memories of his youth and time with his father, he has the readers on the brink of sobbing aloud - just as he lets loose with a quick quip that leaves them laughing on the floor. Similarly, readers will find themselves laughing, just as the tears began to fall. Sullivan's got a true talent of weaving words in a comfortable, eloquent manner so prevalent in great southern literature. He has the mastery of storytelling like John Grisham with the self-deprecating southern humor of Rick Bragg. I am looking forward to his next works.

This magnificent book is a subtle tribute to the author's father. Apparently, subtlety is lost on some of the philistines who posted reviews below - so let me help. If you want a book all about horsies - this is not it. If you want a series of reflections written in the "new journalism" style of Tom Wolfe and arranged around a journalist's coverage of the Kentucky Derby, "Blood Horses" will draw you in and astonish you time and time again. Sullivan is a genius, his elegiac and moving work will last, and we will hear more from him.

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