



Another Man's Treasure

Nipsy's Star: Calm and Collected

by LISA GROOTHEDDE

Tranquility. *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as "the quality or state of being calm; serenity." One magical place that embodies this definition can be found here in California, in the peaceful mountain valley of Tehachapi.

Founded in 1998 by Cobra Farm owner Gary Biszantz and horse welfare advocate Priscilla Clark, the Harry A. Biszantz Memorial Center for Thoroughbred Retirement—appropriately dubbed Tranquility Farm—is a 40-acre sanctuary that caters to the needs of racetrack and breeding shed veterans through rehabilitation, retraining or comfortable retirement.

Every year, roughly 25 of the facility's 90 equine residents are adopted by outside owners for second careers in the show ring, on the trail or in the pasture of a loving new home. Those not suitable for adoption, however, are no less fortunate. Thanks to the generous support of individuals and corporations, these retirees spend lazy days grazing in large, irrigated pastures and enjoy personal attention from four full-time staff members and visitors of all ages.

One such patron is California Thoroughbred Breeders Association member Diane Esper of Burbank. A lifelong racing fan who cheered on rags-to-riches legend Seabiscuit and the popular router Malicious as a young girl during the 1930s, Esper parlayed her affection for another runner into a remarkable act of charity more than six decades later.

Multiple graded stakes winner Nostalgia's Star was a crowd favorite of the 1980s who gradually joined Snow Chief as the second California-bred to break the \$2 million earnings barrier. Esper tracked Nostalgia's Star first as a racehorse then as a stallion, using an internet e-mail program to receive updates on his progeny's progress.

"He was the kind of horse I liked, a stretch runner," she explained. "And when he went to stud, I started following his kids and grandkids."

Bred and originally owned by Sid Dishal's Carillon Farm, fourth-crop son Nipsy's Star was a modest performer on the Northern California circuit from 1996 to 2001. Like his sire, he excelled at distances exceeding a mile; unlike his sire, he toiled in mid-level allowance and claiming races, attempting stakes company only three times in his 31-race career. The Cal-bred absconded with one of those tests, the grassy 1998 San Matean Handicap at the Bay Meadows Fair.

Through the internet, Esper monitored Nipsy's Star after he transferred to the East Coast in early 2002. His final victory, the sixth of his career and first in three years, came in a \$4,000 Mountaineer Park claimer that February. But two lackluster efforts followed, and when the concerned horsewoman received notice that the road-weary gelding lagged 33 lengths behind the winner of a cheap Fonner Park contest in April, she felt it was time to act.

Placing a phone call to trainer Cliff Balcom, Esper introduced herself and said, "I don't know what your plans are for Nipsy's Star, but if you're thinking about retiring him, I'd be interested in purchasing him from you."

A week later, Balcom called with the news that he had detected heat in one of the horse's legs following a work and was ready to discuss her proposal. As fate would have it, the chestnut warrior who had collected better than \$170,000 over a seven-year period was purchased for a mere \$1,500—sight unseen—and shipped back across the country to his native soil.

Nipsy's Star began his new life of leisure at Tranquility Farm in June 2002. Ironically, his dam, a winning daughter of Power Ruler named Nipsy's Niece, was also a resident at the time; the pensioned Black Oak Farm broodmare and her final foal had been placed in Clark's care the previous year.

Today, 11-year-old Nipsy's Star shares a four-acre paddock with five other geldings who also found their way to Tranquility. One, a durable Kentucky-bred named Lese Majeste, competed in an astounding 190 races and was subsequently donated by a sympathetic New York horseplayer whose own internet research led him to the California retirement farm.

As for the sole stakes-winning son of Nostalgia's Star, his devoted benefactor regularly makes the two-hour drive north from Burbank simply to offer him some well-earned treats.

"He was a little shy at first, but he eventually warmed up," Esper recalled. "It didn't take him long to figure out that I was the lady with the carrots."

And with the compassionate spirit that's easy for any animal lover to define.

To support the efforts of Tranquility Farm, contact them at (661) 823-0307 or visit www.tranquilityfarmtbs.org



Nipsy's Star in July 2004 (above) and August 1998 (left)