

WASHINGTON TODAY, AND SOME HARNESS RACING REMEMBRANCES

Senator Lincoln Chafee – United States Senator, Rhode Island

Senator Chafee: It's a great pleasure to be here, back with fellow racetrackers.

Yes, I do have manure under my fingernails, and it feels good.

I'd like to tell you briefly how I did end up on the track. I worked summers growing up as a teenager in construction and I was always a laborer. After I finished college I said, "I don't think I want to labor anymore, but I want to stay in construction," so I started looking at how to get into a trade, be a bricklayer or a welder or carpenter. Then I thought I've always grown up with horses and rode ever since I was young, and I always admired our blacksmith Howard Lee. So I saw an ad for a horseshoeing school in Bozeman at Montana State University, applied to it, got accepted, and went out to their 12-week course. I had a terrific teacher, Scott Simpson, one of those people who rarely gave you encouragement but when he did it meant a lot. After I finished that course I knew just enough to be dangerous, came back to Rhode Island and started shoeing some backyard horses.

At the time a friend of my father's would go down to Pompano and he said, "Linc, you've got to get on the racetrack. You've got to go down to Pompano. You've got to get in the harness track, that's the most fun place to be." So I took a trip down to Pompano, walked around, and saw the shoers in their shop. I said, "Definitely, this is for me. This is what I want to do—get out of those backyard horses and start working on the track. I've got to work for somebody, learn more on the forge than I learned in school." I set out from Rhode Island and started down the East Coast, stopping at various tracks. I stopped at Freehold, Roosevelt, the Meadows, Brandywine, Monticello, Vernon, Batavia. At each one, I'd sneak in on the racetrack and go around to the shops asking the blacksmiths, "Do you need a helper?" and they'd say, "No thanks, no thanks, no thanks," and I kept going on to the next track. I had my list and my map, and I got to Lexington, Kentucky, and each of the shops there said, "No thanks, no thanks," until the last guy. It was a Friday, he was just putting the padlock on his door to his shop, and he said, "Come in Monday, see how it works out."

All weekend I hoped that he'd hire me. I came in Monday, kept my mouth shut, and he put me to work pulling shoes. I knew enough that he kept me going. He was one of those great people, as I said of Scott Simpson at the school. This blacksmith, Jack Perry—Black Jack he called himself—was one of those great

people that come into your lives every once in a while. Instead of making me sweep the floor for three years before getting under a horse, he had me pulling shoes and paring hooves and then eventually nailing on shoes. When I first picked up my hammer, I had my old saddle-horse hammer with a big, heavy head, he said, “Oh, no you don’t,” and handed me a 10-ounce racetrack hammer. Of course, I’m flailing away, missing the nail. He didn’t say, “Out you go, get out from under that horse.” He let me flail away for a while, get the hang of that new hammer and get the hang of the new tools.

Even after the end of the day people would come in the shop. We had a great meet there at The Red Mile, shoeing a lot of horses, working all day long, working on Saturdays. At the end of the day, sometimes someone would come in and say, “My horse is racing tonight, his shoes are worn out, can you shoe him?” and Jack would say, “No, I’m all done, but my assistant here will shoe him if you don’t mind.” And they’d go, hmm, maybe... maybe not, but then they decide, let’s give it a try. Jack would sit there and I’d get a chance to shoe the horse from top to bottom. It was great experience, and really, really valuable, as opposed to the assistants that I’ve talked to that got into the business. It takes them a long time, they’re sweeping the floor for three years before they get a chance. Because ultimately you’re considered a competitor, and nobody wants any competition.

Jack was different. He really gave me a shot and let me shoe the horses. He really taught me. Some days he was a little cranky and he would take the shoe if I didn't shape it right and chuck it across the shoeing shop, and I'd have to duck. Whatever he said. If he said, "Eat that pile of manure," I think I would have, practically, in gratitude for him giving me a chance.

At the end of the meet he was going on to Louisville Downs and he said, "The shop's too small for two people, Linc, so you ought to go off on your own." I started asking people coming through the shop, "Do you know a good place for a young guy to get started?" Some Canadians were there and one of them, a trainer, said, "I was racing in Alberta, Canada, and I couldn't get my horses shod." So I said, "I'm going to give it a shot. No one else is giving me anything else that sounds promising," so I packed up my sedan and across the country I went. I got to the border in Montana, went to the old shoeing school to say hi to Scott my old teacher. He said, "I don't think you can make it across the border. They're not going to let you across the border." I kind of hid my tools in the back of the trunk, and luckily when I crossed the border they didn't open my trunk, or I think they would have turned me around. I got to Stampede Park and got through the gate. The first person I saw was shoeing a horse, so I stood there for a while and we started talking. He said, "You're a shoer?" and I said, "Yeah," and he said, "I'm a

trainer. I'm shoeing my horses just because no one else will. Get your tools and get set up. I got three right there that need to be shod." It was just a dream come true for a young guy all of a sudden to have work.

I stayed the rest of the summer, working on horses. I think the first horse that won a race was Don Apple. I remember him. He came out of the five-hole, so I've always bet horses coming out of the five-hole ever since. There was another one, Moving High that was my first two-minute horse. Back then two-minutes was still a good time, so I have a soft spot in my heart for Moving High. All in all it was a great experience at Stampede Park. As the fall and winter came, some of my customers were going to Vancouver to race at a new track they just started called Cloverdale. Keith and John Waples and a partner had started it, so I thought I'll give that a try. My business was starting to slack off. Some of the farmers were going back to their farms. Some of the retired people would kick you out and turn out their horses. Some of my customers were going on to Cloverdale. So I went over the mountains but I couldn't get started at Cloverdale. They wouldn't let my cold forge in the shedrow, and different things just didn't go right. All of a sudden I'm running out of business and I figured, if I've got to work for somebody, I might as well go back to the best, and work for some of the best shoers in the business. I've already kind of made it here, why work for somebody that I can

compete with here? I believed in my heart. I said, "I'm going back to Pompano and see if I can get a job working for somebody."

I went all the way diagonally down the country, showed up at Pompano and went around asking people if I could shoe there. I didn't get it right away, so I had to groom for a little bit, which was also a great experience. Harnessing up the horses, mucking the stalls. Of course I grew up with a horse. I knew how to clean a stall, but didn't know too much about harnessing up. I learned that, groomed for a while. Then one of the blacksmith's assistants quit and, as soon as I heard that, I made a beeline for his shop. He hired me. His name was Dick Neville and he was racing out of Scioto. I haven't kept up with Dick, I don't know if he's still at Scioto, but he was a great character. He was left-handed and his anvil faced the wrong way, so I had to learn to work on the anvil facing the wrong way. The other interesting thing about Dick is, since he was left-handed, he was kind of ambidextrous. He'd nail the right side of the shoes with his right hand and the left side of the shoes with his left hand. He was a good boss and we shod a lot of good horses. He had Stanley Dancer's account, George Sholty's account, Bill Popfinger's. I think we worked on Mistletoe Shalee. I see there's still a Mistletoe Shalee race, and I say, "I worked on that horse!" You know Florida Pro. I think we shod Florida Pro. He might have won the Hambletonian or something and he

was a good horse. It was just a terrific experience being there at Pompano—the gorgeous weather, the training track, which I hear now is gone and it breaks all of our hearts to hear that, all the history associated with that track. To see Del Miller, Billy Haughton, Ralph Baldwin, my idols as I read about them, going around the track training their 2-year-olds. It was just a terrific experience but as the winter came to a close, I said, “I think I’ll go back to Alberta and see if I can get back to working for myself.” Dick was paying me \$100 a week and I could easily make that on my own shoeing horses. So back up to Alberta and, the first time I’d been there, I was working on a horse. My head was down, as they say, head down, elbows moving, and ass up. I was in that position and I saw four pant legs with four business shoes, and said, “Uh-oh, this doesn’t look good.” I finished, my head down, working on the foot and sure enough it was RCMP and Immigration. They said, “Get in the car.” All I could see was my trainer kind of going, uh-oh, we knew it, we knew it, a guy from America, some kind of a murderer or something.

But by finishing the foot, after they said, “Do you have your papers or anything?” “No, I don’t.” The immigration guy said, “Gee, that looks like fun. You looked like you knew what you were doing. After you finish through the court proceedings, come see me and I’ll see if I can’t help you.” So on to the first order of business. I did have a ticket so I had to go to court. There in Calgary the judges

have the white wigs and there are all these kind of prostitutes and drug dealers before me, and Mike Case comes up and says, “Shoeing horses illegally at Stampede Park.” He leaned over with his wig and said, “What are you doing up here in the land of gophers? \$50! Next!”

So I took out my, it was all new to me then, a red \$50 bill. I did have one of those, and went off and paid my fine with my red Canadian \$50 bill and then went down to see the immigration fellow.

He said, “If you can get somebody to vouch that you’re working there, I’ll get you...” I think it was landed immigrant status. So I asked some of the trainers I was working for and everyone was, “I don’t want to go downtown, no thanks,” but one guy did. He said, “Sure, I’ll come down.”

We went into this bureaucratic building downtown, people in suits and everything. When it came time to sign, I think he got scared, so instead of signing his name he said, “I’m illiterate,” and put an X. I did hear that good guy, who came through for me, got in trouble out in Ontario by selling horsemeat as beef. That’s the industry sometimes, all sorts of characters. I hope he’s reformed and is back making a good living again racing horses, because he sure came through for me.

I was able to come back that second time after going to Pompano. I had my landed immigrant status and spent another seven years working up there in Alberta. It was just a tremendous experience. You could talk for hours about all the various experiences you have, but certainly working the winters with the 30 below and the congeniality you get when the weather really socks you in up there. We did race in the winter, rarely cancelled. Of course, they'd have the sheepskin on the chest, I'm sure you guys know all this, and the earmuffs. They'd continued to race, even in the cold weather, and the congeniality that would come when the weather really got down there. People that you didn't really talk to too much would sit at the table together, and I just remember that as a great experience.

Every Sunday the Invitational was the big race. At the end of it whoever won would buy the beer. Everybody was welcome to come over to the shedrow, it'd always be a good time because it was the last race of the last day of the weekend, and drink and congratulate the winners. Terrific, terrific experiences.

My horses did well. A trainer from British Columbia came in with a whole stable and he asked me to shoe them. One was a horse called Overburden, and he was in the Invitational. He was racing against Ed Tracy's fast horse called Herbert

Dundee. They went down to the half—back then this was fast—went down to the half in about 57, and everybody's cheering. They separated from the rest of the field, and down the backstretch and then down the stretch they came, the two of them, and everybody's just standing up and cheering. They just broke the track record by about 2 seconds, 1:57.2. I think claimers go that fast now, but back then it was fast. It was one of those great experiences to see everybody cheering. Even those that lost, instead of ripping up their tickets in disgust and throwing them down, everybody's just cheering, because it's such an exciting race.

I took Overburden's shoes, next time he came in to be shod, that he won the race in and put them off to the side and got them chromed. I've got them in my senate office up on a placard now. One of the proudest things in my life is shoeing Overburden and seeing that great race.

Another exciting thing that happened there, I did like to bet on the horses I shod, was I was looking at the program and shoeing some horses that were racing in the early races. Usually by the time I'd get done and go back and shower up, I'd get back to the track in the afternoons to have a few beers and maybe place a few wagers on probably the 5th or 6th or 7th race. But I saw some of the horses that I shod that I liked in the early race, and they had the Pick 3, win three in the first

three races, to try and get people to come out early. So I hurried home, showered up, got back to the track and put my \$4 bet on the Pick 3. I think it was a \$2 bet but I picked two horses in one race, and it came in. I got \$1,002 on my \$4 bet.

My dad was running for office, it was 1982, for the Senate. I hadn't been back in a long time, so I took my \$1,000, told my clients I'd be gone for a couple of days, went down to the Calgary Airport and bought a round-trip ticket to see my dad's win in 1982 for the United States Senate. If it hadn't been for—in particular I remember BC Baron was the horse that really came through for me in the Pick 3—but if it hadn't been for BC Baron, I wouldn't have been able to go back and see my dad win that senate race. It was very close, and it helped me when I ran for Senate. I got back early enough to see his debate, and when I ran this past fall, I remember, good thing I had that experience of watching my dad in the debate because I've seen it before, and how scary it looked being up there. But at least you can visualize in your mind, if that were ever me, what would it be like. It was a very close race for him—even during the night it was very close, they didn't know who was going to win—so I was very happy to have BC Baron send me back home to be part of that.

But eventually after those long winters—and I mean long, long winters—you come

to the track sometimes in the morning and the puddles will be frozen in late September. I can remember it snowing in early June in Calgary, and I didn't know anybody out there other than the people I met on the track. I thought, well, I think I'll go back to Rhode Island and maybe go up to Foxboro and work, or down to Yonkers or Roosevelt or somewhere, and try and get started there. I came back to Rhode Island and started dabbling in politics, local office, city council and I got a side job there in Rhode Island. I kind of got out of the industry, but it's still in my heart. I still have manure deep under my fingernails, and I do want to represent your industry in Washington as best I can.

I see that you have a capital gains holding period that you're interested in changing from 24 months to 12 months. I'd like to help on that in particular. I think all of you agree that the most important thing for the industry is getting people to own horses, and getting back to buying claimers. Getting a start in it and then moving their way up the ladder. Enjoying it and getting their friends out and coming to the track and owning and getting involved in the industry.

And how exciting that can be. I do remember, at Calgary, a couple named Gord and Ila Rumble. They had the worst luck, but every year they were there supporting their trainer and their two or three-horse stable. I went back and looked

at some old programs to say, "Is my memory wrong?" but no, every one of those horses I saw in my old programs were 7th, 8th, 6th, 4th, never getting much of a check. Then they got a young 2-year-old that started to do well just before I left Calgary, and I started reading about him after I came back to Rhode Island. His name was On The Road Again, and Gord and Ila Rumble somehow hit it with Harry Polton, who didn't have a speck of luck for the seven years I was in Alberta. They hit it, and it couldn't have happened to a more deserving couple. Because they were there watching their horses run, supporting the industry, and they hit it big. He was horse of the year, made a million dollars, whatever it was. I hear some signs of recognition, so you all know On The Road Again. I think even Dave DeBusschere, when they had a lottery system to get the first draft pick in the NBA held up On The Road Again's horseshoe and said, "I need the luck to get the number one pick!" because that year Patrick Ewing or some big star was coming out, and he got it. He held up On The Road Again's shoe, I don't know where he got it, but I said, "I know that horse. I raced with that horse out in his 2-year-old year in Alberta." They did get the number one pick. The Knicks did get Patrick Ewing.

So I would like to help with the industry any way I can; working into getting a start back in Rhode Island. Of course you've got Plainridge right across the border. I

think that probably the best thing, reading the book about Seabiscuit they said Seabiscuit was mentioned more than the president in the press, is if you get a star. It helped to have Michael Jordan in the NBA, and golf, of course, Tiger Woods, and pro wrestling, Hulk Hogan, whatever it is. To have a Dan Patch or someone come into the industry that just galvanizes. You just kind of wait and hope that you get a great horse that galvanizes public opinion. That they don't retire too early, can keep racing and get everybody excited about the sport. I'll certainly do everything I can. It's going to be an exciting year in Washington. The house is very evenly separated between Democrats and Republicans and the Senate's the same way. We've got the elections in 2002 but between all the excitement, I'm going to try and help the horse racing industry as best I can. Thank you very much for inviting me here.