

*Jo Anne Normile is the founder of CANTER, the first on-track racehorse rescue in the country. A member of the Michigan Horse Welfare Coalition and a board member of Animal Advocates of Michigan, Normile recently co-founded a new nonprofit, Saving Baby Equine Charity, which raises funds to distribute to those who strive to help all horses.*

**Monday, September 26, 2011 International Equine Horse Welfare Conference**

**Thank you, Dr. Marini. And thank you also to Vicki Tobin and John Holland of the Equine Welfare Alliance, Laura Allen of the Animal Law Coalition, R.T. Fitch of the Wild Horse Freedom Federation, and to all the others who helped organize this conference for inviting me to speak. I appreciate the opportunity.**

**I wish I could say I'm happy to be here today. But I'm not. I'm here because of my own horse, Reel Surprise, lovingly known as Baby, and what I learned about racing due to the experience I put him through.**

**I never intended to race him. In fact, I never even intended to own him. I was just leasing his mother and he came with the package because the leased mare was heavy in foal. Once the mare foaled, I would breed her to a son of Secretariat, but the newborn foal would go back to its owner when weaned.**

**I didn't want to race my future grandchild of Secretariat, either. I just wanted a piece of Secretariat in my backyard, like a giant snow globe come to life.**

**But things didn't go as planned. Because I fell in love with the Baby—the one I wasn't supposed to keep.**

**(Slide 1 of Power Point) Here is Baby rooting on me for an udder!**

**He could be hundreds of feet away in the pasture behind the house. But if he saw me coming out through the kitchen door, he'd start walking toward me. If I clapped, he broke into a gallop to reach me faster.**

**So you see, I had to keep him. There was no way I could give him back at weaning time. And the man said I could have him - as long as I raced him. You see, as Baby's breeder, he would get check for \$500 from the State of MI every time Baby won a race.**

**I knew nothing about racing, absolutely nothing, other than what I saw watching the Kentucky Derby on my TV screen. I figured, how bad could it be?**

**On television, at least, horseracing comes across as a glamorous mélange of mint juleps and celebrity set against a backdrop of equine grace and speed. The sight of a shimmering Thoroughbred tearing down the backstretch - and then being draped**

with a blanket of flowers at the finish while his well-heeled owner holds the trophy...it was a vision that was hard not to like.

But as I learned by degrees by being on the backstretch every morning, the magic that enchants is a veneer. For every Secretariat, for every Seabiscuit, there are tens of thousands of racehorses whose experiences on the back lots of the country's tracks tell a different story.

Don't get me wrong. There's a reason the Kentucky Derby is known as the most exciting two minutes in sports. Racing is like a drug, an intoxicating ecstasy. I loved it. (Slide 2 of Power Point.) Here's the picture from Baby's first win. A hand ride, meaning no whip was used, and he's the only horse in the win picture. I was so proud of him!

But Thoroughbred racing is anything other than the splendid display it seems from the grandstand. On the backstretch of the track, where paint peels and potholes mark the gravel roads, money-hungry owners, trainers, and even veterinarians treat the "athletes" who earn them their livings with stunning disregard.

I thought it would be different for Baby. I thought that by going to the track every single day, I could protect him. I thought by being elected to the board of directors

of MI's two racing organizations, that I could protect him. But I could not, and one terrible day Baby paid the ultimate price. (Slide 3 of Power Point.) Here is a picture of his shattered tibia. No amount of money could save him. I immediately took home from the track my Secretariat granddaughter, Scarlett. I never intended to race her either, but how could I leave her home once Baby got into the act?

At the insistence of the horsemen, I continued my duties on the racing board of directors even though everyone knew I had no horses racing. It was as a member of that board that I learned that the track had an uneven surface and knew about it but wouldn't cough up the \$600,000 it would cost to fix it. That's how Baby shattered his leg. I sued the track, made some enemies, and won a small settlement.

The pervasive abuse of the horses I didn't actually learn about until *after* Baby died. I thought it was just our crummy little track outside of Detroit that treated horses as disposable. I learned more when I tried to right my mistake.

To somehow make up for Baby's death, one year later in 1997, I founded and served as the executive director of the country's first on-track racehorse rescue, CANTER. Its focus was to help those horses ending their days in the bottom level races at the Detroit Race Course, to save them from slaughter.

**You've got to understand that the Kentucky Derby is just the cherry on top. Fully 70 percent of Thoroughbred races are known as claiming races, and that's what most of the races were in Detroit. Claiming races are really dumping grounds for horses that have injuries too severe to let them continue to run at a higher level. As the horses drop through the ranks, lower and lower, bottom-level trainers wait like vultures to grab these horses. If drug doping and injections into fractured joints go on at the higher levels of racing, the bottom level, end-of-the-line races are saturated with it.**

**CANTER took in over 100 horses each year from our tiny track in Michigan.**

**Offspring of some of the most famous stallions in the country crossed the finish line the last time there. Sons and daughters of Secretariat, Gulch, Dynaformer, AP Indy, Strike the Gold – there is not enough time to list them all. Horses that had broken track records at top racetracks or won races at Saratoga hobbled into our rescue.**

**In a special collaboration with Michigan State University Veterinary College, we raised funds for over \$50,000 a year on surgeries to help these crippled horses.**

**The most common injuries we saw were fractures of the ankles, knees, and hocks that left pieces of bone floating in the horses' joints. They had been forced to run on those fractures, their pain dulled by a variety of drugs administered by the track veterinarian. With each race or morning work-out, those razor sharp pieces of bone caused further damage and more pain. (Slide 4 of Power Point) 6-year-old Sandra's**

**Brave was forced to race on this slab fracture. CANTER provided surgery, but the gelding would never again be fully sound. Notice the sharp edges.**

**(Slide 5 of Power Point) – Here is another view of the same piece of bone.**

**(Slide 6 of Power Point) 9 bone fragments were removed from the knee of Lady Faltaat. Successful on the track as a 2-year-old, she raced but once at 3. Her surgery helped only to relieve her pain...just 3 years old, she could never carry a rider again.**

**(Slide 7 of Power Point) This x-ray shows 3 screws holding together the ankle of 9-year-old gelding Winds of Love, who raced 8 straight years. Yes, 8 of his 9 years, nearly his entire life, he raced. Once ridden by famous jockey Pat Day in far-away Florida, he loaded onto our MI CANTER trailer trembling in pain after having come in last, beaten soundly in his 102<sup>nd</sup> race. He had been entered to race as frequently as every 7 days and had raced for four years on those screws. We still had to pay \$250 so he would not go to slaughter, but nothing could be done to save him.**

**Winds of Love became another one of our CANTER MI statistics: 30% of the horses we took in would have to be euthanized due to the severity of their injuries— horses that had been actively racing.**

**But as bad as all this is, it's not the worst of it. Some horses that race on pain killers stumble across the finish line yet are made to limp back to their stall rather**

than wait for the horse ambulance. The trainers and owners want the horse to make it back to its stall so it can enter the slaughter pipeline.

Had Baby belonged to someone else I realized, he could have easily ended up in an auction kill pen with duct tape holding his fractured tibia together rather than humanely euthanized.

USDA documents acquired by Animals Angels through the Freedom of Information Act show the number of Thoroughbred horses slaughtered to be 19% of the total. We know that in 2010 112,904 American horses were slaughtered. With 19% of those being Thoroughbreds, that means that approximately 21,451 Thoroughbreds were slaughtered in 2010. This is an amount equal to 3 of the 4 Thoroughbred foals the Jockey Club anticipated would be born that year.

Racing is certainly not the Sport of Kings. It's not a sport at all. It is a \$40 billion gambling industry that operates completely unregulated. The large hats, the celebrity spottings at high-level races – those are props meant to disguise the real action, which is not only abuse of horses but also fleecing at its worst. Spectators and bettors follow what amount to rigged events. Other than a couple of drugs, no one knows which horses have received which drugs to prop them up or improve their performance. The scam is akin to walking into a casino where the dice are

loaded and the cards marked. Thirty-seven racing jurisdictions throughout the country have an arcane, overlapping set of rules that amount to nothing more than suggestions.

It all comes down to money. The MORE horses that race, the MORE BETS are placed and the industry makes its income from the BETS on these horses. The BETS or MONEY WAGERED provide purse money for future races, the racetrack owners' profit, and salaries of racing commission employees. That's why the racetrack owner's racing secretary pressures trainers to enter more and more horses. Even the so-called independent racing commission veterinarians whose job is to scratch lame horses strive to fill races. Their incomes, too, depend on it. It is a direct conflict of interest. That's why, in my opinion, hands-on, active flexion pre-race lameness examinations that could stop the injured from racing are usually not properly conducted at over 100 racetracks.

What I used to see was the regulatory vet peeking in a horse's stall and then checking off something on his clipboard. He didn't even *touch* the horses racing that day. The next two so-called exams intended to scratch a lame horse were just visual exams. The first made after the horses walk past the grandstand. They have been saddled, have jockeys on their backs, and they are fractious before the crowd. The next visual exam that is supposed to pick out the lame horse is when the vet watches the horses at the starting gate -another area that makes horses prance and nervous. You



**know what I mean. You've seen them loading on TV. At our track, these two visual exams to spot a sore horse were performed by a small animal veterinarian!**

**Worse still, if pain killers don't work to get an injured horse running... corticosteroid injections into damaged joints, Lidocaine, bute, banamine, or even illegal cobra venom...some horses undergo a procedure that severs the nerve to their heel, thereby blocking pain sensation and preventing awareness of deterioration. Heel nerving is a felony in Arizona yet permitted in other states.**

**(Slide 8 of Power Point) Here's a sample of what gamblers must be shown. An arrow by the equipment column?...bettors know the horse is wearing blinkers to keep its vision forward even though they can clearly see that the horse is wearing blinkers! But integrity is important. The bettors must be informed. But nowhere on any form is it required that the betting public be informed of a horse racing on a foot it cannot feel! Extra equipment, yes. A severed nerve, no.**

**In Britain and other countries, heel nerving is strictly prohibited. And penalties for doping horses are severe. Repeated violations ban trainers for life. Meanwhile, our trainers with repeated shameful violations, or with histories of racing horses to death or selling them for slaughter simply move to another track or state. Some are inducted into Racing's Hall of Fame.**

**How did it come to this? Well, in the late 1970s, the racing industry successfully**

lobbied Congress to pass a law allowing races to be simulcast on track televisions. Racetracks have banks of televisions showing races from all over the country so that gamblers in one state can bet across state lines. They are the only gambling entity allowed to do this. In 1980, Congress introduced legislation to create uniform rules for racing. But the industry pushed back, assuring Congress that it would create its own rules.

Almost 30 years later, fed up with waiting for those rules, Congress convened a hearing in 2008. The hearing came after a disastrous Kentucky Derby, where a filly Eight Belles crossed the finish line and collapsed on shattered ankles, second only to the steroid-laden Big Brown.

(Slide 9 of Power Point) With her face slammed into the dirt, more than 15 million spectators watched as the filly unsuccessfully struggled to rise before a screen hid the view.

During the hearing, Congressmen asked for opinions from witnesses: Was it time for Congress to step in and ban drugs from racing, impose strict violations, and appoint an independent commissioner to stop the racing industry from policing itself?

Some of the most respected individuals in racing testified and requested an end to

the “chemical horse” and Congressional oversight.

But the head of the Jockey Club at the time, Alan Marzelli, whose personal compensation from the racing industry that year was over 2.2 million dollars, stated they would “improve the health and safety of Thoroughbreds.” When asked by Congressman Ed Whitfield from Kentucky: “Do you have the power to put this into effect . . .?” the then president of the Jockey Club, responded: “No. We have the power of persuasion and consensus-building.”

Still Congress relented, giving the industry additional time.

It has been more than 3 years. What has racing done to improve the welfare of the Thoroughbred racehorse?

The National Thoroughbred Racing Association, a marketing organization, tried a plan to accredit racetracks with a “Code of Standards,” but the rules have absolutely no teeth. Nothing is “ordered” or “mandated.”

A February 2011 report by their own appointed monitor admitted that only 19 tracks have been accredited. That is just 19 tracks out of approximately 120 that hold Thoroughbred races in this country.

**Bettors still bet their wagers in the dark about what's going on, and horses still run on drugs and broken bodies.**

**The very same marketing organization just unveiled its Aftercare web site. This is great publicity, but the reality is not there. Not one of these Aftercare programs stepped in to help the racehorses last month with ransoms of \$400 a piece or they would go to slaughter. The Aftercare programs did not rescue horses from the KY slaughter auction last month. These horses had just raced -- one still had sweat marks from its saddle and poultice on one leg.**

**The president of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, Alex Waldrop, gave this testimony at the 2008 hearing: "The health and safety of our equine athletes is paramount..." and it is his organization that took all these years to come up with these two plans that do not work.**

**Individual racetrack owners have also been deceiving the public in their claims to have what they call No Slaughter Policies. Yet the tracks themselves welcome to their backstretch trainers who are well known kill buyers. When you view the documentary today, Saving America's Horses, look for the names of any racetracks to see if they have provided ANY financial support at all to stop the slaughter of their horses through the power of this film. I can tell you right now: They have not.**

**I believe the ultimate deception to be the newly created Jockey Club Equine Injury Database. It purports to tell you the number of horses that died because they raced. Their most recent release indicated 2 deaths per 1000 racing starts.**

**But think about what is missing:**

- 1. Only 73 tracks are participating. The other dead horses are not counted.**
- 2. 32% of fatal injuries occur in training, not racing. Those dead are not counted.**
- 3. Young horses, literally babies -- still yearlings and 2 year olds -- die when forced to run at impossibly high speeds to impress buyers, but those dead are not counted.**
- 4. I have specifically asked that the Equine Injury Database allow veterinarians working with rescuers to complete a form when a horse is rescued from racing with injuries so severe the horse must be euthanized. They chose not to do this. Remember at our little Michigan track that we euthanized an average of 30% of the horses that came in? Well, not just in MI but no horses rescued and then euthanized by anyone or any rescue anywhere are counted. They died because they raced, but those dead are not counted.**
- 5. Of course, horses that are sent to slaughter rather than die in a race are not counted, yet these racehorses are just as dead as Eight Belles.**

**So the next time you read a statistic published by the Jockey Club Equine Injury Database please remember:**

**There are thousands of forgotten horses that they have neglected to count.**

**There is no transparency.**

**They do not provide the names of the dead horses so you can see a real number and check for horses missing from their list.**

**They do not let the public know which racetracks have the worst death rates so people can stop betting at those tracks.**

**No transparency.**

**I've been familiar with Thoroughbred racing now for 18 years. I've tried to make up for the needless death of my horse by founding CANTER. I've been involved in helping to get legislation off the ground that would protect Thoroughbreds and all horses, but it never makes it off the committee floor, never even makes it to a full Congressional vote.**

**Like those who testified at the hearing, I've been waiting a long time. Scarlett, Secretariat's granddaughter, will be 20 next year. I watch her in the pasture**

behind my house, wishing her half brother Baby could be with her, even *waiting* for him although I know that's impossible.

Allowing the status quo is not acceptable in a compassionate society.

I hope that the more inside information the public knows -- that watching Thoroughbred horse racing as it is today is not a grand way to spend time but a fun-house view of torture and ignominious death -- then the faster that change will come.

Before the question and answer, I would like to announce that Joy Aten former CANTER board member; renowned veterinarian Doctor Nicholas Dodman; Larry Lindner, a *NYT* best selling author; and I have founded a new nonprofit organization called Saving Baby Equine Charity, [savingbaby.org](http://savingbaby.org), to raise funds to disburse to those who strive to help all horses. Also, I have been collaborating with Larry on a book of my experiences entitled *Saving Baby*, with a portion of the sales donated directly to the nonprofit. Please watch for the book to be released next spring. Thank you for listening to me today.

**(Slide 10 of Power Point) During Q & A**