

"My Ole Kentucky Home"

Kentucky Derby morning, My Nike's were double tied; spandex triathlon shorts glistened against the molecules of moisture the New Mexico sky was ceremoniously delivering downward. And I was off--running three miles around the West Mesa Albuquerque New Mexico Neighborhoods I tread, back to transition area and within moments I was up in the saddle of my trusty carbon bike for my 12 mile bike ride, taking me past the Petroglyph National Monument and on to the Olympic size pool, where I traded in my lungs for gills as I serpentine lap after lap for the finish line.

You've come a LONG WAY BABY!!

Back in Louisville, Kentucky I had been a smoker. My lungs had been toast. My form of racing was high atop a Thoroughbred Horse, a Kentucky standard of horse. I was astride an amazing athlete thundering under me, lunging over turf-spawned jump after jump across two thousand meters, into water, over rock walls, across massive ditches. My horse's heart, hooves, and lungs delivered me from Dressage to Cross Country to Stadium.

Life's transition has taken me to New Mexico. Nine Years have passed since the pastels of New Mexico Mesas have drawn me in-- Forced me to trade in my green pastures for high desert-- Forced me to trade in my Kentucky Tobacco for cycling sessions along the Turquoise Trail with antelope and Buffalo by my side.

But there is no place like the present and its Saturday May 2, 4:30 P.M. Mountain time and I am transported to Louisville Kentucky through my flat screened Toshiba Television screen amidst the sea of people, and mint leaves, the whiskey, the large brimmed hats, the sultry lilt off southern lips, the movie stars and moguls on millionaire row high above the field of horses submitting to the starting gate apparatus. The all too familiar horn heralds the impending motion of horseflesh setting off to the shrill starting bell. Seated now in my New Mexico brown leather sofa, staring into my yesterday through my flat screened television I am wondering what people I know are now sitting in the stands of the miniature version of the Church Hill Downs set before me, this the first Saturday in May. And now they are singing the state song, My Old Kentucky Home. And it seems as if they are singing it to me and my throat aches.

And therrrrrrrrrrreeeeeeeee Offffffff. The track was muddy. It had been raining in Louisville too. The dirt track looked like milk chocolate frosting. The silks of the jockeys combined with the silks worn by the women in the stands. The NBC announcer had adopted the rhythm of Race Horse reporting. Coming round the inside, in the lead. Coming up behind. And it's.....

I saw a light bay horse poke its nose off the inside, right on the rail and move forward fast, like a missile. I heard myself say, "He's gonna do it". And he ran and he ran eating ground like a hungry man, a chasm growing between him and the cluster of equine hooves and flesh, the field behind him and.....it was over. A piece of cinematic history. Bob Fosse couldn't have choreographed it to create more of a thrill. New Mexico owned and trained MINE THAT BIRD a fifty to one long shot had won. And won BIG.

It was sensory overload. A maelstrom of high intensity images invoking emotion, tears, and inspiration. That little engine that could kind of American mentality. Everyone has his or her fair shot sense of possibility.

The images and sounds of the track, the jubilant cries of the tiny jockey, his raised rose to his dead parents, the large black hat of the Bloomington New Mexico Trainer, complete with crutches. I heard abbreviated versions of the story of his van dragging his trailer containing the Derby Winner Mine That Bird across the 1700 mile stretch from Roswell New Mexico to the finish and start line at Church Hill Downs Track. I heard talk of the \$9500 price tag of the colt at auction, the New Mexico trainer's cowboy demeanor, his certainly not southern styled goatee and sunglasses belied his out west, don't hem me in manner. I heard that the owners were Roswell

based boys, and I felt proud to be in my New Mexico home cheering on this unlikely contender.

This 50 to 1 horse, this straight to the finish line, odd gaited gelding who had taken the lead, walked straight in through the back door and kept his nose to the rail and then won with all the confidence and commitment of a real champion.

I saw the now Governor of Kentucky hand the winners their silver Trophy, crafted by Louisville craftsmen and I heard the words "Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear." I was stunned, as I saw, Steve Beshear, a man I had shook hands with, the husband of a woman I had competed at horse shows with. My worlds were swirling. My old Kentucky Home and My New Mexico Home were partners in an extraordinary dance that I didn't have a name for and it was fabulous.