



GARY YOUNG

✎ Ed Golden 📷 Benoit & Associates

For a guy whose livelihood is based on calculations measured in milliseconds, Gary Young never seems to be in a hurry.

But he is a quick study with a quicker opinion, remindful of Woody Allen's quip: "I took a course in speed reading and read *War and Peace* in 20 minutes. "It's about Russia."

Gary Young's life is about racing, and consummately longer than 20 minutes. It started when his parents took him to Arlington Park at the age of six, too young to realize it was chapter one of an engrossing biography.

Half a century later, Young is a respected fixture at the apex of his profession as a private clocker and bloodstock agent, providing information for a fee, winning the odd bet with his own dough, and earning sizeable chunks of change as a buyer or seller of young horses at the sales ring.

Sitting in an open box in the last row of the Club House on any given morning, Young has all the tools of a clocker's trade at hand: binoculars, stop watch, pens, pencils, notepad, recording devices, the obligatory cell phone, snacks, liquid refreshment and other assorted paraphernalia.

He confirms for posterity the horses' workouts into his recorder with the verbal rat-a-tat-tat of a polished auctioneer, not missing a beat.

His is a specialized sanctum. It has been thus for four decades now.

Born in Joliet, Ill., Gary grew up in nearby Lockport and got his first glimpse of major racing at Arlington Park in Arlington Heights, about 28 miles and a 30-minute ride from Chicago.

"My dad would take me to the paddock and point out certain things, like horses washing out," Young said, recalling those halcyon days of yesteryear. "We saw horses like Damascus, Dr. Fager and Buckpasser run there. When I was 12 years old, Secretariat came to Arlington after he won the Triple Crown at Belmont in 1973.

"At that time, there was really big-time racing at Arlington Park. It started sliding later that decade, ironically after (owner) Marge Everett got caught bribing the governor to build a freeway from downtown Chicago to Arlington Park."

It was there he linked his liaison with the Winick family—Arnold, Neal and Randy—Arnold being the most prominent of the trio in the Windy City area.

"Arnold was a really big trainer in Illinois," Young said. "We'd see each other and I'd say hi to him. My parents (Cliff and Rachel) were weary of the Illinois winters and always talked about moving to Miami where Winick primarily was based.

"He told me if I ever came there to stop by and I could have a job. About 1978, we moved to Florida where I started at the bottom, walking hots and later grooming horses for Neal, who was trainer of the Winick stable there. Randy was training in California.

"As a groom, I became very aware that I was severely allergic to hay. The inside of my arms would burn like they were on fire if I filled up a hay net. Turned out, the Winicks always had someone who would go up in the grandstand and time horses, watch their horses work, watch other horses work, and make recommendations on ones to purchase or claim.

"Neal decided that because of my allergy, I couldn't groom horses, so he bought me a stopwatch and sent me to the grandstand to time horses. It was in April of 1979 when I was 18. This past April marked 40 years I've been a clocker."

During that span, Young has received testimonials from the game's biggest players, among them Jerry Bailey and Todd Pletcher. Noted Bailey: "Gary Young has the unique ability to spot good horses at two-year-old-in-training sales after they come to the track to embark on their careers.

"Having watched him grow in racing from the bottom up, his foundation is rock solid and his eye for talent as good as any in the game."

Added Pletcher: "Gary found Life at Ten for us. His record at auction speaks for itself. He commands respect in many aspects of the racing world."

Young readily acknowledges he's made more money buying and selling horses than betting on them, although his maiden triumph as a gambler remains fresh in his memory.

"The first horse I clocked and bet on that won was trained by Stan Hough, who was the dominant trainer in Florida at that time, along with Winick," Young said. "It was the first horse that Hough bred, and it was named Lawson Isles. He paid \$12 or \$14.

"I thought to myself, 'That's pretty cool.' Little did I know that I'd still be doing it 40 years down the road.

"I spent a couple years around Florida clocking, and in the fall of 1980, a horse came to our barn named Spence Bay that Arnold had purchased out of the Arc de Triomphe sale.



“He was the meanest horse you’d ever want to be around but also an unbelievable talent. He won a couple stakes in Florida like a really good horse, but Arnold always would cut back his stock there and around April, he sent some to California, including Spence Bay.

“California was California at that time, and I took the opportunity to come there with Spence Bay in April of 1981 and clock horses.

“I stopped working for the Winicks about 1983, but it was amicable, not bitter by any means. They were kind of downsizing a bit then anyway, and I basically went out on my own. I got my last steady paycheck around 1983, before I started clocking.

“Racing was really good in California at that time, and the Pick Six was very popular and appealing. I’d provide my information to Pick Six players for a percentage of the winnings, and I hit a lot of them in the 80s.”

Times have changed, however. “These days, I definitely make more money buying and selling horses than I do gambling,” Young said. “It’s not the same.

“Everyone knows everybody’s business, and anyone can watch workouts in person or on XBTV, which isn’t a bad thing, even though everyone doesn’t have the same sense of expertise or knowledge.

“A guy like (private clocker) Andy Harrington, who is a good friend of mine, has insightful reports that many people rely on—some even pay for them—but gambling for me these days is not nearly as lucrative as it was in the 80s and 90s. Even in the early 2000s it was really good, but it’s been on a slow slide the last year.

“There was a time, however, at the 1983 fall meet at Hollywood Park, when I waited and waited on a horse

to run. I mentioned to Craig O’Bryan, who was Eddie Delahoussaye’s agent at the time, that he might want to ride the horse. He did, and it was Mighty Adversary who I think paid \$83 and wound up winning the Santa Anita Derby the next year.

“The very next day after Mighty Adversary broke his maiden, a horse named Not Even a Card was running off a layoff, and she had trained exceptionally well for Lee Rossi. Fernando Toro was on her. Toro and I became good friends when he rode Spence Bay for us, and I’m still friends with him to this day.

“Obviously, I had a pocketful of money from the day before, and I saw The Bull (Toro’s nickname) that day and asked him what he thought of the filly in the sixth race. He said, ‘She’s ready.’ She won and paid \$62. I don’t foresee doing that again in my lifetime.

“Nowadays, if I get a first-time starter to pay \$10 or \$11, I think I’ve really pulled a coup.

“Ideally, if times were more stable these days, I’d be thinking of moving to Del Mar, like some people do when they get to be my age, but with what’s gone on in California in the last year or so, that’s on hold.

“I’m very grateful I was here for racing in the 80s because I don’t think I’ll ever see a decade like that again. Being here then compared to racing today—and I’m not just singling out Santa Anita—is very different.

“When I was younger, I was interested in all the races, but as I’ve grown older, I basically concentrate on those with higher quality horses or promising two-year-old prospects in maiden special weight races.

“By 2000, you could sense a downward shift, in California as well as the East Coast. California horses

more than held their own in the classics and turf races during the (Charlie) Whittingham and (Bobby) Frankel eras.

"Frankel was not the warm, lovable type but he was smart. Back then he raced full time in California during the winter, with a skeleton stable in the summer. But he sensed the evolving trend and later started running more in New York.

"Where do I see racing going in California's future? That's the million-dollar question.

"It's kind of troubling because I go to my gym every day, flip on the races while I'm on the elliptical machine, and people look at me like I'm Charles Manson or somebody. That bothers me. The glory days of clocking and gambling are behind us, for the time being.

"My main focus these days is buying horses for people out of the two-year-old sales, and I have a couple clients in California—Aron Wellman and Michael House. But chances of picking up a new client in California these days aren't very promising.

"If someone really wanted me to, I'd go to the yearling sales, but I'm at a point in my life where I'm not really looking to increase my workload. So basically, the sales I concentrate on are the two-year-old sales that run from March through the middle of June.

"From the start of March through the Preakness sale in Timonium (Maryland), I'm out of town more than I'm in town. I don't really like doing that, but it's what I need to do to maintain my lifestyle.

"This is the time of year I go to Del Mar and clock horses, and if you get it rolling there, you can make money gambling, although it's difficult. Unpredictable things happen where the turf meets the surf.

"If you're on the right end, it can be a very good place to gamble, but it also can be a very frustrating place. It's the only track in the world where Skimming could beat Tiznow twice and Dare and Go could beat Cigar.

"What's happening in racing now disturbs me because I love this sport. It's provided me with a very good life, but I'm concerned about the future, not only in California but elsewhere."

Respected turf authority Ray Paulick elaborated on Young's anxiety when he alluded to 30 equine deaths at the Santa Anita meet that ran from Dec. 26 through June 23. He wrote: "Santa Anita has been the focal point for animal rights protestors who want to end racing, and a bloodthirsty media seeking television ratings and internet clicks."

One aspect in this controversial furor that has reached stentorian levels puzzles Young. "For the life of me," he said, "I can't understand why we invited the PETA people to the table. That's like asking Colonel Sanders to watch your chickens, as far as I'm concerned."

Young plans to continue buying and selling horses "as long as I have customers. When Bolo won the Shoemaker Mile in June, he was the 20th Grade 1 winner I had a hand in purchasing."

He also is proud of selecting 1993 Breeders' Cup Juvenile champion Brocco for the late Albert and Dana Broccoli, producers of the iconic James Bond movies, and is eternally grateful to them. "They gave me my first big chance, and I'll never forget them for that," Gary said.

Young lives in Pasadena, a few furlongs from pastoral Santa Anita with his longtime girlfriend, confidant and soul mate Jennifer Knight, who hails from South Bend in the Hoosier State, but is not kin to the irascible former Indiana University basketball coach, Bobby Knight.

"When I learned she was from Indiana and her last name was Knight, the first thing I asked her was if she was related," Young joked. "I didn't want her throwing a chair at me."

These are blissful times together for the couple, but as in all families, into each life some rain must fall. Young is no exception.

"Both my parents died of Alzheimer's disease," Gary said. "They lived a mile from me in Pasadena. My dad was 82 when he died in 2000, and my mom was 89 when she died in 2011."

Abandoning any signs of a degenerate gambler consumed by avarice, Young did what any loving son would do: he bared his soul and showed he cared.

Doing anything else would have been disingenuous, like a guy saying he goes to Hooters strictly for the food.

"It was tough," Young said. "My dad had to be placed in a nursing home across the street from Santa Anita, but my mom died in her apartment. Basically, I stayed home from Del Mar for seven years to look after her because it was something I had to do."

And justifiably so, because after all, racing is merely a game, a business, while life and death are finite diversions, offering the inevitable in positive and negative perspectives.

Still, racing offers a vision unique unto itself, worthy of climbing the mountain in pursuit of a new horizon.

This axiom from Alaskan dog sledders comes to mind: "If you're not the lead dog, the view never changes." **T**

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