

HALF A CENTURY OF ONE WHOLEHEARTED GUY

by Chris McGrath

A Monday morning at Glencrest Farm, early in the spring of 1973, and here comes this teenage kid to see what it might be like to work with horses. The dairy where Gene Guy had been employed was closing down, but its owner W.W. Greathouse also had some Thoroughbreds on a place out near Midway and his son had said why not come out and give that a try. Guy lasted until lunchtime.

It sounds as though John W. Greathouse, Sr. had maybe tested him out a little.

"He told me to grab this mare and bring it to the teasing board," Guy remembers. "And, man, she was kicking and bucking and screaming and, to tell you the truth, I was scared to death. And I guess my eyes got big, and John, Sr. and his son Johnny [Jr.] were over there laughing."

Guy continued, "And then it was, 'All right. You can put her up.' And, boy, was I glad to do that. She wasn't in heat, didn't want to be bothered with no teaser. But I didn't realize all that. Now that I know, I see that was all pretty wild. But at the time I said to myself, 'Oh, Lord, I don't know if I want this job or not.' Those Holsteins never did carry on like that!"

And actually Guy felt sick by lunchtime and never came back in the afternoon. John, Sr. telephoned early evening.

"You all right?"

"Yeah."

"You going to come back tomorrow?"

"Well..." And Guy pictured that livid old mare. He hesitated, thought for a minute. "Yeah, I'll come back. I'll give it another day."

That was exactly half a century ago, on Friday, and for the bulk of that time Guy has been working for the Greathouse family as farm manager, becoming not merely cherished, but more or less indispensable. His caliber was so obvious, from the outset, that every week that March he received a bigger envelope.

"The first month, I got four raises," he recalls. "So that felt pretty cool. And the rest is history. I must have been 18 or 19, a

year out of school. And I'm still here, 50 years on. Guess I liked it!"

In the meantime, the young man who watched Guy struggle with that mare first succeeded his own father, alongside his brothers; and now their respective sons, John III, Deuce and Bucky have stepped up to various roles on the farm and beyond.

But Guy's unstinting work ethic, plus an instinct for managing both horses and people, have made him a fixed point of reference throughout.

"Gene has been running at least our broodmare division and the main farm since I've been born," says John Greathouse, III. "And I'm almost 40 years old. So, yes, he's been doing this a whole long time. And he taught me just about everything I know about horses. The thing about Gene is that he cares so much. The guy really, really cares: about the animals, about doing a good job. For six months a year, during the breeding season, he would never take a day off."

That was evidently the way Guy was brought up--and that was also, no doubt, how he won over John Greathouse, Sr.

"When someone says 'hardboot,' he was what they mean," Guy recalls of his first boss. "When I got here, his sons were about to take over and he was pretty strict. He just wanted everything done right. If you did it right, he was happy with you."

And if you didn't?

"Well," Guy replies with a chuckle. "You would hear about it! But I guess I caught on pretty fast. We milked 50 Holsteins every day, my daddy and I, so I was no 'slackard.' I had a great work habit, never needed an alarm clock. And I just started taking it over: doing the teasing, meeting the vets, holding the mares. A little bit of everything."

Which, on this farm, meant a little bit of plenty. For a medium-sized operation, Glencrest has always had a very diverse portfolio. As a result, Guy has not only maintained continuity between generations, but also between disciplines.

"For a time we had a breeding shed here," he recalls. "I learned a lot about that from Johnny [Jr.], after his dad stepped



Bucky Greathouse, Gene Guy and John Greathouse, III

photo courtesy Glencrest Farm

down. He was in the stallion barn with me the first year and then it was my turn to handle it. We had Clever Trick. He was a good-natured horse. He'd just come in, do his business and was done. And Wavering Monarch the same. Stallions were hard work, but seeing their babies going on to the track and doing so well was fun, and good for business.”



Glencrest Farm | *photo courtesy Glencrest Farm*

But Guy's principal satisfaction has always been foaling.

“I like to see new life come in the world,” he says. “And then, when you turn them out the first time, their little legs going every which way, wobbling and running and playing. And you see them thinking, ‘Wow, so this is life outside that stall.’ That's the best part: just a couple days old and they realize they've got legs and can run and jump and kick. And mama running after them, so proud.”

In his prime, Guy was a powerful specimen. Once he brought down a deer with his bare hands before hoisting it onto his truck. But that prowess was evidently less pivotal to team discipline than a more fundamental authority.

“Gene has always had the ‘doer’ mentality,” explains John III's cousin Bucky, who supervises the farm's agricultural division. “Obviously as you move up the ranks, you can get out of some jobs. But it helps when you've led by example, like he has. Everybody knows that you're not above any job. You've done the same as they're doing and, if need be, they know you'll help do it at any time.”

Guy, equally, only has praise for those who have worked under him. “There's been big changes, from where it used to be,” he remarks. “We have a lot of foreigners here now. But thank God for them, because it's hard to find Americans that want to work anymore. And we've got a really good team right now.”

Guy continues, “John III and Bucky can relate to them all, and that helps, too. They have a good rapport with our workers, so

everybody's on the same page. But I never had a problem, with race or anything else, everything has gone along fine all the way.”

That fleeting reference acknowledges that it remains rare for African Americans to have senior roles in the breeding industry. But while Guy insists that he has never experienced any issues, he surely deserves celebration as a role model for any who aspire to improve the wider situation.

“I really haven't thought about that,” he says. “Not many African Americans go into the horse business, so that's why you don't have a big pool to choose from. It's not bias or anything like that. That's the way I look at it.”

John, III agrees that Guy can be a model for anyone, regardless of ethnicity or background.

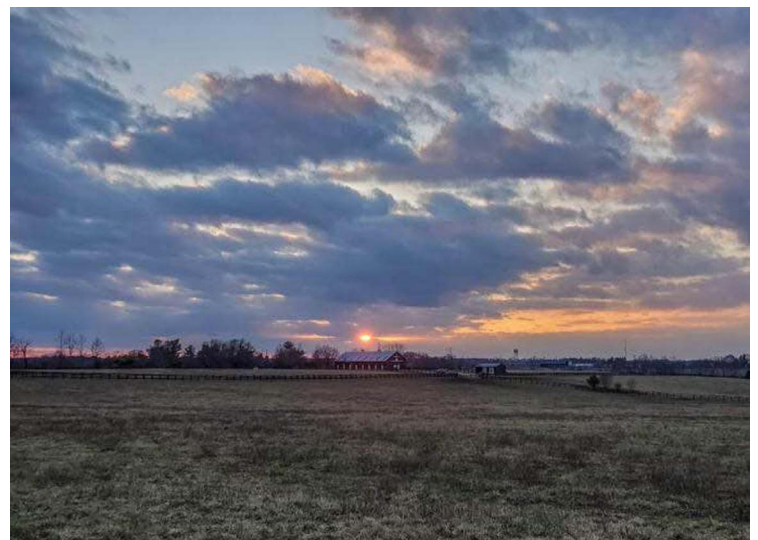
“Probably when he first started, the African American presence in the industry was a lot stronger as far as racetrack and guys taking care of horses,” he reflects. “Over the years, that has slowly transitioned. But Gene, when I was born, was an African American working with a bunch of Caucasian guys. He was in charge of all of them--and he made it work.”

Nobody, of course, can testify to Guy's contribution better than “Johnny, Jr.,” as he still calls him.

“Gene's not going to toot his own horn,” John Greathouse, Jr. says. “Nobody is looking to be an all-star here. They're just looking to get the job done right. Make sure all the animals are okay. If the animals are okay, we're all okay. And he's just one of those guys that understands horses.”

“He's been around them a long time now. He was always willing to work, just had to acquire the knowledge. And after all these years, foaling mares with me and then with John, he knows what he's doing. And that's just something you can't replace, 50 years of experience. It's not something you can hand over to somebody else and say, ‘Okay, you go do it.’”

Though Glencrest will inevitably have episodes of colic, vets have suggested that they tend to be caught earlier than



Sunset at Glencrest Farm | *photo courtesy Glencrest Farm*

elsewhere. And John, Jr. credits that to Guy's eternal vigilance.

"He's never far from the farm," he says. "He's always driving around and, even when he's not working, he'll be taking these wonderful pictures to share on Facebook. Gene's just the kind of person that anyone would love to have work for them, as reliable and steady as any human being I've ever been around. And a nice person to go with it--and the same goes for his wife and daughter."

Those long-suffering ladies have long reconciled themselves to sharing Guy's dedicated nature with his employers.

"Yeah, I was gone a lot of the time," admits Guy wryly.

"Especially during the foaling season. But my wife [Cathy] did a good job and my daughter [Carly] has turned out great."

There have, of course, been labor-saving advances since 1973, but somehow life doesn't seem much more relaxed to Guy.

"You used to have to bale your own hay and straw, but now we have tractors picking up those big hay rolls," he says. "Same with the manure truck coming through the barn. As far as that goes, our work is more efficient than it was.

But I think it's more hectic than back then. Horses are worth so much these days, people have a lot of money invested. So you better be on your toes and make sure you do a good job. If people send a horse in here to be taken care of, to me that's a big responsibility."

And that, of course, is precisely why the Greathouse family has been able to trust him through every stage of every cycle. As John, Jr. notes, for instance, Guy foaled and raised Wavering Monarch, but also supervised his return to the farm as a stallion.

"In any business, it counts for a lot to have somebody you can trust," Bucky says. "Gene has essentially been part of our family for almost his entire life. And he's still an asset, still brings something to the table. He's not just working with some honorary title, not just here because of longevity. Gene still brings value to the job every day. And I think that speaks volumes about his character. It's not just the loyalty factor, but the dependability. If ever there's been a problem with a horse, you've known that you can always call Gene and Gene will know what to do."

That integration with the Greathouse dynasty obtains a nearly literal quality when Guy, talking with the latest generation at the helm, refers to their grandfather as "Old Dad." He's a living link

to their family history, to the foundations of the farm. John, III and Bucky both mention how they turn to Guy to chart the waterlines, and that subterranean knowledge almost seems a metaphor for the very lifeblood of Glencrest.

"I think that for Gene, with my cousins John and Deuce on the horse side, it's like you're working with somebody, not for somebody," Bucky adds. "Everybody's worked and grown up together, everybody has a good relationship, and that's what makes it work."

John, III has never even mentioned the "r" word (retirement) to Gene. "I'm afraid to bring it up, in case he might actually do

it!" he says. "He's never once talked even about slowing down. If ever he did, he can be here as long as he wants, in whatever capacity he wants. He could ride out into the sunset or he stay here until he's in the ground! It's up to him.

"When I took over the farm, the place wasn't in great financial shape. We weren't real sure how long we were going to stay open. We could certainly have gotten smaller, run 30 horses without needing all the help we had. But most

of the guys here have been with us a long time. I've another gentleman, Ricky Evans, here 35 years. And we felt like we owed it to them to make it work, to try and keep them around. And now the farm's in as good shape as it's been in a long time, because of Gene."

In any walk of life, 50 years with a single employer is a remarkable achievement. In one as demanding as that embraced by Guy, it's quite astounding.

"John, Sr. ran the place when I came," he reflects. "Then it was Johnny, David, Allen and Teddy for 20-some years. And now their sons are running it. It's still kind of odd, without Johnny on the farm every day, like he used to be. And of course David passed away. So it's different. I built John, III a treehouse when he was three or four years old--and now he's running the whole thing! Can you imagine? But yeah, 50 years since my first day on Glencrest. And it just feels like yesterday."



Glencrest Farm | *photo courtesy Glencrest Farm*

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