

THE LOVE of the TURF

HAMISH MCLACHLAN of Channel 7 launched the Spring Racing Carnival for Racing Victoria, describing a personal journey that has led to a lifelong love affair with racing. His speech was so well received that *Inside Racing* has run it in full.

I was asked to sum up why so many people find it so easy to fall in love with this sport; I can only speak from my experience. Everyone has different reasons as to how, and why, and when, they fell for this magnificent sport.

For me it came very early. My first racing memory was

watching Kingston Town get run down by Gurner's Lane in the 1982 Melbourne Cup. I ran the school sweep, taking some liberties. I allocated myself "the King". I was seven. It is fair to say I was an early adopter.

I have ridden horses since I was a kid, to school, in track work in four

countries, but never in a race.

I've bred horses, most of them have run very slowly.

I've never trained a winner, but have been in the morning mist, watching the gallops, with the best of them.

I've called many sports, but never the sport of kings.

WHITE NOSE: Neville Percival, in the McLachlan tartan, returns to scale after winning the 1931 Melbourne Cup.

PHOTO VRC COLLECTION



I took to the punt well before I was legally allowed to do so, but, I'm still working for a living.

But, for all that I am very fortunate to have deep family links to a sport I have loved from the moment I was introduced to it.

My family traces through generations of racing history, but I am neither a product of a dominant dam, nor a potent sire.

My great-grandfather, H.P. McLachlan, bred and raced the 1931 Melbourne Cup winner, White Nose, the Cup that saw Phar Lap carry 10st 10lb—68kg in today's terms — to finish eighth as the 3/1 favourite. White Nose, carried just over 43kg, about the weight of Stephen Arnold's right leg.

Only recently, my brother Gillon, who is just as passionate about racing as I am, re-registered the family colours carried by jockey Neville Percival to win the Cup that day—McLachlan tartan, white sash. We remain optimistic, as all of us need to do in this game, that one day we may again see those colours in the great race.

White Nose was not H.P.'s only shot at winning the Cup.

In 1922, before a record crowd of 115,000, his home-bred stallion Paratoo—White Nose's sire—led at the distance, before fading to finish five lengths from the winner King Ingoda, fourth according to the judge (unofficially), seventh according to the papers of the day.

White Nose's Cup win, by the way, was worth 7000 quid with a 200 quid trophy. The trophy (a cup) still exists in our family, and is switched around year on year between siblings and uncles and cousins, and is seen most often displayed under the family's Christmas tree. Last year, to be honest, it was filled with brandy butter for the Christmas pudding early in the day before it was used as a golf ball holder for the Christmas golf competition in the afternoon.

And so I have a close connection with the Melbourne Cup from my sire's side, but the dam's side has been influential too.

My mother's father, W.J.T. (Trevor) Clarke, was a committeeman and vice-chairman of the VRC for nigh on 20 years, and his long service



IN FOCUS: Hamish McLachlan delivers his speech, "The Love Of The Turf", at the launch of the Spring Racing Carnival.

PHOTOS COLIN BULL

has been recognised by the club naming several races after him. He was a wonderful horseman.

Once he had seen the two-year-olds race early in the season, he had no need for a racebook again that season, he would know them by sight thereafter, and the depth of their breeding too.

He bred a Caulfield Guineas winner, and loved racing for the horse, and not the punt. He taught us about the movement in a horse's walk, and to look for the kind eye.

My grandmother, Sandra Clarke, loved racing too. She attended my grandfather's race every year after his passing. My three brothers and me—and our partners—would join her every year without fail in the

today in this glorious sport, has been handed on to us by those who set it up—those who lit the flame.

Gran influenced my mother and Mum influenced me too. My mother had her owner-trainer licence and worked a moderate team out of our farm, just out of the Barossa — not far from what would become my second home, Lindsay Park.

She had set one horse, Boghero, named after a rodeo clown, to win at Balaklava, and we all set off, certain we were about to make our fortunes. Gillon was 14, and I was 12, and mum handed us a fiver each to back the good thing.

Into the ring we went, and put on our money with a bookmaker, turning a blind—

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HAMISH MCLACHLAN

VRC Committee Room; and in doing so upsetting most of the committee through our behaviour. We kept up that ritual until she died three years ago, at the age of 104. Invitations permitting, we will continue to get together for years to come.

Racing brings families together. I love that about racing.

However, Gran would reiterate to us every year that we were merely passers-by in this game and that we all needed to understand that what we have

and kind—eye to the fact we were years short of the legal age to bet. Not so kindly were a couple of constables, who grabbed us. “Good afternoon boys, how old are you both?” one constable said.

“I am 12 but Gill's 14. If you like a bet, Boghero's good value. Mum trains him and says he can win.” I may have been a little naïve.

“Well” said the larger copper, “do your parents know you're betting?”

“Of course,” we said in

chorus, “Mum gave us the money to bet with.”

“And where would your mother be?” said the big fella.

“She's in the stand. The horses are on the way to the barrier.”

They had no sense of the occasion.

They made us wait in the stewards' office, and then went to interrogate mum.

They said to her: “Do you know your children are betting on the races?”

“Of course,” she said, “but if you'll excuse me, my horse is about to jump.”

“Madam,” said the chief copper, “what do you care more about, your children, or your horse?”

“Right now,” she said, “it's the horse!”

We were thrown out of the racecourse before they jumped and we missed the race altogether. Boghero ran third.

Our tickets were confiscated.

We had lost our each-way money, learnt that there's no such thing as a certainty, but knew we were hooked in a sport that mixes the wildly implausible with the most extraordinary possibilities.

We also learnt that the next best thing to backing a winner is the story surrounding the loser. The fact is, win or lose, if we're in this business, we're all winners.

No matter who you are, or what you do, or where you are from—whether you're a cranky copper from Balaklava, a top-hatted taxi driver from Queanbeyan, or a risk-taking patriarch from Paratoo, anyone of us can live the dream — anyone of us can be a winner.

The doomsayers reckon the dream is now the domain of the rich and famous, but they forget about Joe Janiak and Takeover Target; and about Lauren Stojakovic and Miracles Of Life; and they forget Sheikh Mohammad still hasn't won the Cup—but a school teacher from Darwin has, with Rogan Josh.

And they forget that, for most of us, a win at Balaklava, or Ballarat, or even the Healesville picnics, is another opportunity for another photo above the fireplace, another tiny piece in this amazing tapestry that is Australian racing. **U**