

## Good Reading: A Book Report of Willie Shoemaker's *Fire Horse* *Submitted by Cecile Pasquino-Casson*

Since I get Derby fever every year in May, I pulled Willie Shoemaker's book "Fire Horse" off my shelf to put me in a Thoroughbred state of mind. I was really curious to learn whether a professional jockey could churn out a novel worthy of praise in literary circles. I was pleasantly surprised what a good author Willie proved to be. The first thing I thought of was what I learned at a writer's workshop some years back:

**"Rule #1. Write something that you know about and write from there."**

Well, Mr. Shoemaker certainly knew race horses and the racing world and wrote from his vast knowledge of the subject.

"Fire Horse," his second novel is an interesting and unique blend of horse culture, romance, fantasy, fact, intrigue, detective wit and mystery.

When I was young I used to sneak off and read some of my Uncle Samuel "Dick" Hall's (one of Delaware City's Town Policeman during the early twentieth century) vast collection of True Detective magazines and ever since I have considered myself somewhat a reader/connoisseur of the detective genre. I found out later at Anne Rule's, another of my all-time favorite authors, book signing in Dover that she wrote a lot of the true detective stories under a pseudonym.

"Fire Horse" reminded me of some of those stories, ones that leave you thinking. It weaves a tale touching on an occurrence on the dark side of racing. Ex-jockey Coley Killebrew turned private investigator tries to solve a case

involving some unscrupulous owners who switched winning horses with other horses and staged accidents in order to collect the insurance money on the winning horses. I read a true case of this fraud in the horse world a number of years ago. Coley is genuinely concerned over the safety of the horses involved and this is very apparent throughout the whole novel.

I learned on page 125 about the clock in a racer's head: "I rode in France a few times,... The main difference is they don't go out and set fast fractions like we do here. Instead they all tend to hang back early, sort of like a bicycle race. And they run in a tighter group than we do, crowding the rail and each other most of the way. When it is time to do the real running in the stretch, they start fanning out. That's as much of a cue to the horses that it's time for business as showing them the whip." \*

I had a hard time putting this book down and read it in a short period of time, picking it up whenever I had a few minutes to spare.

Willie Shoemaker, as the winner of 8,833 races, has proved that not only was he one of Thoroughbred racing's finest Jockeys, he was also a very talented writer as well. Robin, the librarian in Delaware City is ordering me a copy of Willie's first novel "Stalking Horse" to read since I enjoyed his first novel so well. Newark Library and Brandywine Hundred libraries have circulating copies of both novels.

\*ISBN 0-449-90596-9

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