



As I write this column, I am watching the running of the 142nd Kentucky Derby. A flood of memories begins with connections to the sport of horse racing that I have made throughout my life. When I was a child, my dad used to take us to New Hampshire to watch harness racing at Hinsdale Raceway. The horses raced pulling a driver in a two-wheeled cart equipped with bicycle wheels. I “helped” my dad pick a possible winner by choosing my favorite colors. I would love to visit my Aunt Harriet, my dad’s sister in Brunswick, New York, as she always shared stories of winning at Saratoga, an elite race track in upstate New York. At the time, they didn’t allow children so I had to imagine the horse races by way of my Aunt Harriet’s stories. Years later my dad used to joke that we never heard of all the money she lost between her big wins. In the early sixties, construction began on a thoroughbred horse racing track in the next town over from where we lived. I never got to experience that since they didn’t open until after we moved from New England.

Fast forward to the 70s when I was a flight attendant for Delta Air Lines. Very early in my career, I worked flights into Louisville, Kentucky, home of the Kentucky Derby. Our planes were DC-9s with an overhead shelf where passengers could put coats and hats, but not luggage. The week of the Derby, heavily-perfumed women boarded with their lightweight round hat boxes

containing their fancy bonnets to wear to the race. Meanwhile the men had their newspapers out studying and highlighting statistics of the horses running. Because the race drew so many people, hotels were at a premium so we didn’t get to layover and be part of the action.

In May of 1987, I was working a night flight out of DFW “puddle-jumping” through Shreveport, Memphis, Louisville and Detroit. I only had one passenger in first class so I knelt in the seat in front of him and began to chat. He was going as far as Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. He seemed very knowledgeable of horse racing and even told me I should bet on a bay colt called Alysheba. The day before the race I told my husband about the conversation and that was the end it --- no bet was made.

The next day we sat before the TV and watched the race. Mid-race, Alysheba was cut off by another horse and just about fell with his jockey. Somehow he regrouped and kept racing. As my passenger in first class predicted, Alysheba won. While they were putting the blanket of roses over his back, the owners and trainer surrounded the beautiful colt. I excitedly turned to my husband and said, “There’s Mr. Van Berg! I guess we should of bet on him!” My husband looked in disbelief at the person I am pointing at, and then said “You didn’t tell me the person on your flight was his trainer!!” Alysheba went on to win the Preakness Stakes, but failed at his run at the Triple Crown.

Thinking back on it, I’ll bet my Aunt Harriet would have had a wager on him.

