

2010 Amish Series: Stories of the Lancaster Amish

by Brad Igou



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In our series this year, we will have a selection of interesting, personal stories about people in the local Amish community, past and present. Sometimes we see the Amish as “cookie-cutter” people, but this series will focus on individuals, both “average” and unusual.

Part 7 - An Amishman Talks About Horses

Several years ago, I was visiting an Amish friend of mine, whom I will call Sam for our purposes here. Sam had just gotten a new horse, and so our conversation turned to things equestrian.

Horses are known by their gaits. There are pacers and trotters. They may be either standard or saddle bred. Trotters hold their head up high as they trot, one foot in front of the other in a sort of prancing style. Pacers sway from side to side as they go down the road. Occasionally a pacer can be made to trot, and some trotters are more for show (style) than for speed

Sometimes a father will buy a horse for his son, which may not be fully broken in. Sam's first horse was bought young (four years old) and trained to the boy's liking. Sam had him for 17 years.

Sam had since owned various horses, sometimes purchasing them from a dealer who got them from the racetrack. But not all horses purchased are accustomed to being around cars and traffic. One family tied their horse in the pasture right by the road until he got used to the cars and trucks going by.

Sam told me about his last horse, Susie. She was 11 years old, and had been broken in as a carriage horse. Susie was often the subject of some good-natured joking...

You see, Sam's wife had passed away several years ago, and he now lived alone in a small house. Susie was kept in a stable area connected to the house, not unlike the garage you and I have for our cars. Sam had many non-Amish friends, who often brought visitors to meet him. Before going for a visit, these friends sometimes told their guests that they might run into Susie, who lived with Sam even though he was not married. Susie was good-looking, and much younger than Sam. However, most people never saw Susie because she was forced to stay in a separate part of the house. But if they wanted to meet her, they could always ask. Of course, no one informed the visitors that Susie was a horse!

So, if one of the visitors asked to meet Susie, Sam would get a twinkle in his eye, and tell them to follow him. One visitor even combed his hair prior to meeting Susie! Naturally, there was much laughter when the visitors discovered who Susie really was.

When Susie was starting to show her age, he needed to look for a replacement. He often observed a neighbor boy drive by with a horse, and Sam liked the way it looked. So, while not getting his hopes up that the boy would part with it, he finally decided to inquire.

The boy's father agreed to sell to Sam because the horse had some “balking problems.” The owner suggested Sam take the horse for a trial period to see what he thought. Sam liked the horse, felt he could overcome the balking, and the sale was made.

All this horse talk reminded Sam of a funny story....

There was an Amishman who had a horse that would balk and stop dead in the middle of the road. The man went away one day and told his sons not to take the horse and carriage anywhere. But “boys will be boys,” and they decided to go out for a short ride after father had gone.

Sure enough, the horse stopped, and refused to move. One boy had the less than brilliant idea of building a little fire under the horse to get it to move. The horse moved all right, but just a few feet, placing the wooden carriage over the fire! Luckily, the boys got the horse to move before much damage was done, but the boys had some explaining to do when their dad came home later that day.

Sam then told me about one horse he had owned that would constantly eat its bedding. Sam threw some peanut shells down to discourage the horse from this habit. Besides, this way, when he cleaned out the stall, he could just throw everything on the garden as natural fertilizer. However, the horse seemed to like the peanut shells.

Sam's veterinarian told him that he was concerned the peanut shells might give the horse a colic. So, the vet suggested mixing in some red pepper with the peanut shells so the horse wouldn't eat them. Sam bought some red pepper and sprinkled it on the peanut shells. The horse tried it and seemed to like the peanut shells even better that way! 

