



My Racing Heart

By Nan Mooney
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An Introduction

My Racing Heart is part memoir, part odyssey into the compelling world of Thoroughbred horse racing. At its heart is Nan's relationship with her grandmother, an adventurer, racing connoisseur, and woman of courage and integrity. May-May fostered in Nan a love of Thoroughbreds and the track, ushering her into a rare corner of the world where risk-taking is daily currency.

Nan thought her emotional link to the races died with May-May, only to have it roar back to life a decade later at New York's Belmont Park. This renewed relationship culminates in a grown-up appreciation for a universe where expectations are constantly defied, and in the realization of a longtime dream -- a trip to the Kentucky Derby.

Far more than just a personal tale, *My Racing Heart* lets readers in on the wild culture and fabulous creatures that rise up around the racetrack. Nan Mooney probes every aspect of the sport: the horses, the jockeys, and trainers, the gambling and corruption, its ages-old history, and its eclectic society. She takes readers from the backstretch of a small-town track to the stands at Churchill Downs, from the mind of an intrepid gambler to the soul of a Thoroughbred. She explores how the sport itself, and the men and women who participate in it, flourish upon the principle that there are no sure things in life.

My Racing Heart speaks to every horse lover, to every sports fanatic, and to everyone who cherishes the thrill of possibility or has ever craved a place to run wild. This unique and exquisite memoir perfectly captures the lure, the glory, and the heartbeat of the track.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe Nan Mooney's relationship with her grandmother, May-May? Aside from their mutual fascination with Thoroughbred racing, what personal qualities do Nan and May-May share? Have there been people in your own life who've served as similar role models?
2. The author parallels her own discovery and appreciation of Thoroughbred racing with her grandmother's story. Has any interest of yours been encouraged as profoundly by a family member? Why?
3. *My Racing Heart* profiles numerous Thoroughbred horses and their owners, breeders, handlers, and trainers. Were there any stories about individual horses that especially touched or moved you?
4. How would you describe the crew of people that populate the backstretch world of Thoroughbred racing? Were you surprised by any of the people interviewed?
5. The author characterizes her relationship with horse racing as a "seduction." Did you find yourself drawn to any aspects of this world? Which ones? Were there any aspects of this community that were less appealing to you?
6. Were there any parts of Mooney's account that you found particularly humorous or affecting? Were there any parts that you found unusually disturbing?
7. What did you think of the various forms of corruption in the Thoroughbred industry? How did you react to her accounts of doped horses, thrown races, and the various forms of fraud perpetrated in the name of winning?
8. Did you learn anything about horse racing that caused you to think differently about Thoroughbreds and racetracks? Did the book stir up any memories? Change any preconceptions?
9. How important is it to find a passion of your own, like Nan and May-May both had for racing? What is your passion? How has it affected other areas of your life?
10. The book is largely about a relationship between two women and a sport. Why do you think women and sports have become so popular recently? What is the appeal of sport vs. other sorts of hobbies or interests? What have you learned from a relationship to a sport, either as an athlete or a fan?
11. In the book, Nan talks about her love of the track as something that often set her apart from those around her. What's the price of being different? What are the rewards?

About the Author

Nan Mooney grew up in Seattle, half an hour north of Longacres racetrack. A self-described tomboy, she immersed herself in the world of horses and sports of all kinds. She graduated from Scripps College with a B.A. in theater and began her career as a fledgling playwright and actor. Mooney has lived in Seattle, London, Los Angeles, and New York, working variously as an actor, editor, and exerciser of polo ponies. She also worked in the publishing and film industries, developing book, script, and story ideas, and writing on the side. Inspired by her experiences at the racetrack and by the special history she shared with her grandmother, Mooney devoted three years to writing *My Racing Heart*. Her work has appeared in *The Blood-Horse*, the journal of record for thoroughbred horse racing, *The Washington Post*, *The Seattle Weekly* and *Slate*. Mooney lives in New York City and trains as an amateur boxer.

