

The CHRONICLE of the HORSE

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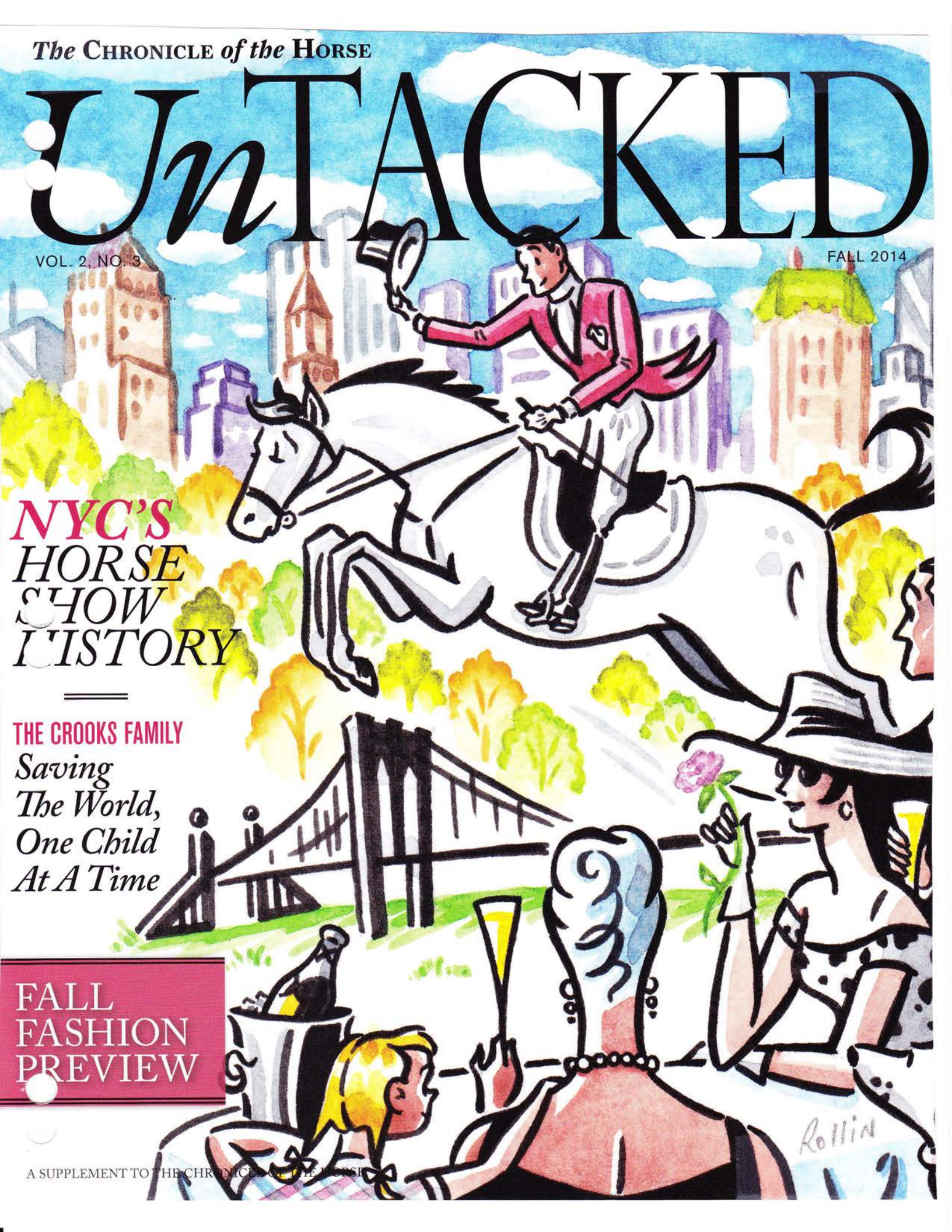
FALL 2014

NYC'S HORSE SHOW LISTORY

THE GROOKS FAMILY
*Saving
The World,
One Child
At A Time*

FALL
FASHION
PREVIEW

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE CHRONICLE OF THE HORSE



AMONG THE LUCKY ONES: NEW YORK CITY ON HORSEBACK

The monster-sized garbage truck was headed straight for the horse I was riding down busy Columbus Avenue, at the height of evening rush hour on New York City's Upper West Side. Gears grinding loudly, the vehicle kept chugging toward us as I maneuvered my horse as close as possible to the parked cars along the curb in an attempt to avoid a truck-horse-human collision.

With non-stop traffic whizzing by just inches away, I couldn't detour across the street, nor could I back up and turn around. The increasing chaos finally became too much for my mount, one of a normally bomb-proof string owned by the nearby Claremont Riding Academy. The frightened gelding started skittering sideways into the street. Certain death seemed imminent.

Suddenly, the truck stopped and cut its engine. Two sanitation workers hopped off to empty a line of trashcans, and I seized the opportunity to hustle on past—calling to my 10-year-old daughter Amy, who was riding behind me, to stay close and move quickly. At the next corner, we turned into a blissfully quiet neighborhood whose streets would take us the remaining block or two to the stable.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I glanced back at Amy. "Well, that was exciting," I said with a wry grin. "So, what's next?"

Amy smiled back knowingly, because the garbage truck encounter hadn't been our first taste of drama on our afternoon riding adventure.

During that six-day New York trip in May of 2000, Amy and I attended a niece's college graduation, saw several Broadway shows, and dined at restaurants throughout Manhattan. But more than anything, we'd wanted to explore Central Park aboard Claremont Riding Academy horses, so I booked a ride for our second day in the city.

Fortunately for Amy and me, Claremont's closing was still seven years in the future (and the park's bridle paths still up to par) when we took our ride. Actually, we took a couple of rides that week. The first one went along without a hitch, and we



For 115 years, riders from around the world traveled a familiar route on horseback—out the doors of Claremont Riding Academy, across Central Park West and into the park—but in April of 2007 the last remaining public stable in Manhattan closed.

CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY IMAGES PHOTO

enjoyed it so much that we booked another a few days later.

As we were leaving the stable that second time out, one of the instructors cautioned Amy that the little Quarter Horse she was riding had "a tendency to put his head down." Translated, of course, that meant he might buck. But my unflappable daughter just sat up straight and sank a bit deeper into her heels as we headed toward the park.

The first part of our ride was similar to the one we'd taken earlier in the week: glorious scenery, warbling birds and well-behaved horses. It wasn't until we were on the final stretch of bridle path that I made a decision I would later regret.

"Hey Mom," Amy said as we ambled toward the Central Park West exit, "could we canter just one more time?"

My first inclination was to say no. Everything had been going so smoothly; why tempt fate? Horses cantering toward home in *any* situation often doesn't end well, as we all know. But my daughter persisted.

"Please? Just, like, for one minute?"

Amy's face was so hopeful that I finally sighed and gave in, on the condition that we'd keep our horses at a very controlled

speed (as we'd done all along). I eased into a sedate canter, listening closely for the reassuring hoof beats of Amy's horse behind me. Then suddenly, there was silence.

I pulled up my horse, knowing instinctively what had happened even before I turned around. Sure enough, there was Amy sitting on the ground, looking sheepish. Her horse had finally seized the opportunity to crow-hop, and Amy slid off. Immediately, my mom side kicked in.

"Amy, are you hurt?"

"No," she mumbled.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," came the reply. Having ridden since age 5, Amy wasn't short on experiences, including the occasional tumble. She was a pretty tough kid.

Next, I quickly assessed the situation. Being as close as we were to Claremont and the horses' supertime, it seemed logical that Amy's horse would have simply bolted on home. But here he was, standing just a few feet from Amy and gobbling grass like there was no tomorrow. A shrewd opportunist, that one. However, not knowing if I were to dismount and help Amy that *my* horse wouldn't be the one to break free and run home (through all that scary traffic), I chose to remain in the saddle.

“OK, here’s the plan,” I said. “Walk over to your horse, lower the stirrup leather and slowly step back on.” Amy stood up, moved cautiously toward her horse and picked up the trailing reins. The little chestnut allowed her to remount, although he was clearly unhappy about having his hors d’oeuvre course terminated.

It wasn’t until Amy was safely back in the irons that I noticed a young couple standing nearby with a baby in a stroller. Their jaws were practically hitting the ground, and I could see that the husband had been poised to dial 911 on his phone.

I’m sure they viewed me as an incredibly negligent and uncaring mother, since I hadn’t rushed screaming to my daughter’s side and called the EMTs myself. Non-horse people; what can you do? Sometimes it’s worth pausing to explain, and sometimes it isn’t. I chose the latter, gaily waving to the couple as Amy and I headed off again. When I looked back a few minutes later, the two were still standing there—staring after us in utter shock.

Amy and I shared a laugh about the whole incident, confident that our excitement was over for the day. Little did we know that a certain garbage truck was waiting for us just a few blocks west...

News of the Central Park Horse Show that’s scheduled to take place Sept. 18-21 stirred my memories of those two long-ago days spent riding in that fabulous place, on horses from such an extraordinary stable. The upcoming event is destined to be a thrilling one, drawing spectators from near and far and once again bringing riding horses to the jewel at the heart of the borough.

No doubt many of Claremont’s former students will be there, juggling a broad range of emotions and memories far more abundant than Amy’s and mine. The closing of any equestrian facility evokes sorrow among its riders and staff that can last a lifetime. But surely, as long as the memories of Claremont exist in people’s hearts, minds and photo albums, the spirit of that particular academy can never truly die.

—*Anne Lang*