“No Hoof, No Horse”

How a farrier spends her days

by NELL PORTER BROWN

Crouched beside Sunny’s dappled belly, Hilary Cloos ’96 holds his hoof in her lap, digging out the dirt and nipping down the hoof wall, as any good pedicurist would. “Come on, good boy,” she murmurs as the teenage palomino shifts uncomfortably. “You are fine, fine. Yes, you are a fine specimen.” The patter calms the horse, which has stood patiently in the barn at the Weatogue Stables, in Salisbury, Connecticut, for more than an hour letting Cloos do her job. Horses generally compete well into their twenties, but Sunny has weak tendons and was retired from dressage work in 2013. “Now we have him in therapeutic shoes only in the front, so he can keep going outside and ambling around comfortably,” Cloos explains while walking out to her truck, a portable blacksmith shop. She grabs a new aluminum shoe, a hammer, and nails, and heads back inside, patting Sunny’s neck, then runs her strong, square hands through his coat: “We’re almost done, good boy.” Taking up the hoof, Cloos nails on the shoe, mindful of the “white line,” an eighth of an inch of keratin protein separating the insensitive hoof wall and live sole tissue. “It took years,” she says, “to get the feel of where that is.” Released, Sunny saunters back to the rolling pastures along the Housatonic River that are his home.

Growing up on Cape Cod, she mounted a horse for the first time at age seven. Lessons were a gift from her mother, Nancy Cloos Babin, and stepfather, David Babin ’56 (her sister is Putney Cloos ’98). She rode for several years, then stopped and didn’t pick up the sport again until freshman year at Harvard, when she began riding for the club team, grateful that the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association does not require competitors to own a horse. “We would arrive and everyone would draw a horse’s name out of a hat and you got on that one, and jumped the course,” she says, laughing. “Everybody was at the same disadvantage of having no idea what they were sitting on.” She focused on women’s studies courses until realizing “my papers were on viewpoints and analysis.” Physics gratified a preference for “more concrete an-

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answers: either you understand how something works, or you don’t.” The advanced
math was always a struggle, but worth it for courses like “Widely Applied Physics,” where “we took apart everything,” she says, “from how high insects can jump to how a nuclear reactor works.” She never discussed horses with her adviser, Mallinckrodt professor of physics Howard Georgi, until her senior year, when he asked about post-graduation plans. “I sort of shamedlessly said I was hoping to be a working student for an event rider—train under a rider and do their barn chores,” she recalls. “Georgi brightened up and said, ‘Oh! My wife has a horse she doesn’t have time to ride.’” Cloos was soon exercising Ann Georgi’s Selle Français, Max, on Boston’s North Shore, and after she graduated, the Georgis sent Max out to her for caretaking once she’d settled in the Hudson Valley.

By then Cloos was riding regularly, but soon run down and attach to the top and bottom of the coffin bone, respectively. “The coffin bone sits in the front of the hoof capsule,” just above the sole, Cloos explains, in front of the carpet area strong enough to carry a horse’s weight when the perimeter of a hoof alone is insufficient. Emergencies occur when the live tissue of the laminae starts sliding through the insensitive tissue and the coffin bone rotates, or the whole mass pushes through the sole of the foot, she says, “That’s when you have blood and pain.”

Injuries do happen, which is why Cloos favors shoeing long-term-performance horses like her “clients.”
Farriers get heated over topics like letting horses run barefoot, she reports: “It’s akin to people who think human runners should run without sneakers. Some can, and there are those who can’t. We haven’t genetically selected for good feet with domesticated horses: we’ve selected for good breeding, we’ve chosen for pretty, fast, or jumps high, and those are not necessarily paired with good feet. In the wild, horses are selected for good feet: the fleet-footed stallions catch the babes and the good-footed mares can carry the babies to term.”

Cloos aims to work with clients throughout their lives; some have been with her for more than 12 years. Horse-racing is more short-term. “The horses are treated as more expendable,” she says. “It may not be fair for me to say that, because I have not spent time on a track,” but in apprenticing at breeding farms, she found the priority was “just about bringing them to sale.” Cloos, on the other hand, spends a significant part of every day nurturing relationships with horses. “Like any animal,” she adds, “they are really responsive to your moods.” The “spooky or flighty” ones make her more nervous, so “I talk to them more, just to remind myself to keep breathing—because if you stop breathing and stiffen up, then they think there is really a problem,” she adds. “They can sense fear, and if you are in a rush with the work, you are really doomed.”

Occasionally, even her sure hands and patient pattern don’t work. She has been kicked a few times, though never hurt—“Usually you are so close to the horse that, if they do kick you, it’s more of a shove out of the way; at the end of the blow is when they have the momentum on it.” There are horses that “for whatever reason, don’t like me, or I don’t like them,” she

The burn marks on Willoughby’s hoof show where further filing is needed; Cloos double-checks the final fit before nailing on the shoe.
says. “It’s like with any person you have to work with: you acknowledge that there is a certain level of discomfort and you try to adapt.” Recently, a horse that had just been brought in from a nearby farm was skittish in the new barn; he “got so upset when I was working on him that he finally just tore away from the person holding him and ran back to the field he had come from,” she says. “That was a bad day.”

But for most horses, shoeing is like going to the dentist, she says: “It’s not how you would choose to spend your time, but you put up with it because you need to.” Sunny is cold-shod, which means his shoes are hammered into shape and attached without being heated (because aluminum melts too easily). His stable-mate Jade is hot-shod, which requires more training, time, and skill, and therefore can be more expensive. Horseshoes range widely in size, materials, and weight; farriers custom-fit each horse depending on its needs, by widening and narrowing the shoe, and by using pads and other add-ons that protect weak points and fill in the gaps to improve how fluidly the foot moves. For teenage riders who might “go hooliganing” around a trail, Cloos screws “caulks,” akin to cleats, onto their horses’ shoes to enhance traction. For Jade, Cloos adds “pour pads” as protection under the shoe because his soles are thin and his coffin bone is easily bruised.

“The goal is to fit them so well it’s like they are wearing nothing,” she says, turning on the propane-fired forge in her truck and using tongs to hold a steel shoe in the flames until it is “orange-hot.” Then she applies it to Jade’s hoof for about five seconds. The billowing smoke smells like burning hair, but her client doesn’t blink because Cloos has trimmed the foot to leave a layer of insensitive tissue. The burns show where she needs to further file down the hoof wall. Then Cloos reheels the shoe to pound it into shape on the anvil.

Brawn doesn’t count much in the process, but Cloos is compact and athletic. “Our instructor at Cornell used to say that farriers went to hell for two reasons: one was not charging enough for their work, and the other was for striking cold metal,” she says. “You just make so much more work for yourself that way. Certainly it’s a strong surface and you are working with iron, but you’re supposed to use the forge to shape the metal—to strike while the iron is hot.” She cuts the pads to fit over the horse’s sole, and then, once the new shoe is shaped and cooled, sets the pads and nails the shoe against them onto Jade’s hoof. Nipping off any sharp edges and using a “clincher” to tuck remaining metal into the hoof wall, she then refiles the hoof and the shoe for a final smooth finish.

Max, for whom Cloos found a Kentucky retirement home in 1999, was the last horse she owned and rode. “I spend most days, all day, with horses,” she says. On the weekends now she’d rather practice the French horn, or hike, bike, or run with her husband, whom she married last April. “I have come to love being a part of the support team, the pit crew,” she says. “I get enough satisfaction—maybe more—out of having my horses compete without having to ride them myself. As kids, I think, we are all drawn to them because they are so powerful and beautiful, and yet we can harness that power because they are generous with their spirit. That’s what keeps me going. As corny as that sounds, I think they really are generous creatures.”

Overseer and HAA Director Candidates

THIS SPRING, alumni can vote for five new Harvard Overseers and six new elected directors of the Harvard Alumni Association (HAA).

Ballots, mailed out by April 1, must be received back in Cambridge by noon on May 22 to be counted. Election results will be announced at HAA’s annual meeting on May 28, on the afternoon of Commencement day. All holders of Harvard degrees, except Corporation members and officers of instruction and government, are entitled to vote for Overseer candidates. The election for HAA directors is open to all Harvard degree-holders.

Candidates for Overseer may also be nominated by petition by obtaining a prescribed number of signatures from eligible degree-holders. (The deadline for all petitions was February 2.)

For Overseer (six-year term):


Fernande R.V. Duffy, J.D. ’78, Boston. Associate Justice, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.


Brian Greene ’84, New York City. Professor of physics and mathematics, Columbia University.

Beth Y. Karlan ’78, M.D. ’82, Los Angeles. Director, Women’s Cancer Program, Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute; director, division of gynecologic oncology, department of obstetrics and gynecology, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center; and professor of obstetrics and gynecology, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Carl F. Muller ’73, J.D.-M.B.A. ’76, Greenville, South Carolina. Attorney.

David B. Weinberg ’74, Chicago. Chairman and CEO, Judd Enterprises, Inc.


For elected director (three-year term):


in the bioenergy and bioengineering fields; secretaries of agriculture and executives
website; a webinar series featuring U.S.
munications, fundraising, and philan-
Alumni for Agriculture SIG in 2011; it has
Through a dedicated group of board mem-
Omaha. The alumnae founded the Harvard
New York, and
Nicole Buckley
foster a stronger alumni community.
A new initiative, “Back to Your
Alumni for Agriculture SIG in 2011; it has
nonprofit executive director. As a way to
create a sense of community and to
and new graduates. Events cater to the
diverse interests and fields represented
have recently included Global Networking
Nights, an event with Jeremy Lin ’10 (now of the Los Angeles Lakers),
tours of the Houston Federal Reserve Building,
and “Back to School” picnics for members
and new students, and their families. The
country, and have recently included Global Networking
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tours of the Houston Federal Reserve Building,
and “Back to School” picnics for members
and new students, and their families. The
and plan a Central European Harvard Ball.
Moreover, it has joined with other Central European alumni in annual interactive
video conferences with Harvard faculty
members. A new initiative, “Back to Your
School,” enables Hungarian club members
to return to their secondary schools to
cuss their experiences and the importance
of higher education.

HAA Clubs and SIGs Awards
The HAA Clubs and SIGs Committee Awards honor both individuals who provide
exemplary service to those groups, and groups that have themselves organized
exceptional programming. This year’s awards were presented to the following recipients at the HAA board of directors’ winter meeting on February 5.

Peter Mazareas ’73, of Nahant, Massachusetts. Starting in 2009, Mazareas became
president of the Harvard Club of the North Shore and established a leadership team
that developed a plan that has revitalized it. Activities that explore New England’s
attractions and local landmarks, along with events featuring congressional leaders, have
consistently drawn new members. Mazareas also created “Making the Curriculum Real,” a program that links alumni with
children in local schools. As an HAA director for northern New England, Mazareas
also convened regional club events to foster a stronger alumni community.

Giulia Stellari ’03, of Port Jefferson, New York, and Nicole Buckley ’08, of
Omaha. The alumnae founded the Harvard Alumni for Agriculture SIG in 2011; it has
since grown to more than 300 members across 39 states and a dozen countries.
Through a dedicated group of board members, the club has focused on investment,
mentorship channels, networking, communications, fundraising, and philanthropy.
Their efforts have led to a robust website; a webinar series featuring U.S.
and involvement in the AgInvest Conference in New York. Students, faculty, alumni, and corporate mentors can now
network and collaborate on agriculture-related projects, bolstering their own professional bonds along with their connection to the University.

Since its inception in 1977, the Harvard University Club of Houston has grown to include more than 4,500 alumni, 450 of whom are recent graduates. Events cater to the
diverse interests and fields represented
have recently included Global Networking
Nights, an event with Jeremy Lin ’10 (now of the Los Angeles Lakers),
tours of the Houston Federal Reserve Building,
and “Back to School” picnics for members
and new students, and their families. The
club hosts Young Alumni Happy Hours and partnered with the Houston Yale Club for a celebratory event around The Game. Last October, the club also drew
crowds for “Your Harvard: Texas,” a gala

A Special Notice Regarding Commencement Day
Thursday, May 28, 2015

Morning Exercises
To accommodate the increasing number of people wishing to attend Harvard’s Commencement Exercises, the following guidelines are provided to facilitate admission into Tercentenary Theatre on Commencement Morning:
• Degree candidates will receive a limited number of tickets to Commencement.
• Their parents and guests must have tickets, which must be shown at the gates in order to enter Tercentenary Theatre.
• Seating capacity is limited; there is standing room on the Widener steps and at the rear and sides of the Theatre.
• For details, visit the Commencement Office website (http://commencement.harvard.edu).

Note: A ticket allows admission, but does not guarantee a seat. Seats are on a first-come basis and can not be reserved. The sale of Commencement tickets is prohibited.

• A very limited supply of tickets is available to alumni and alumnae on a first-come, first-served basis through the Harvard Alumni Association (http://alumni.harvard.edu/annualmeeting). Alumni and guests may view the Morning Exercises over large-screen televisions in the Science Center and at most of the undergraduate Houses and graduate and professional schools. These locations provide ample seating, and tickets are not required.
• College Alumni/ae attending their twenty-fifth, thirty-fifth, and fiftieth reunions will receive tickets at their reunions.

Afternoon Program
The Harvard Alumni Association's Annual Meeting, which includes remarks by its president, Overseer and HAA election results, the presentation of the Harvard Medals, and remarks by President Drew Gilpin Faust and the Commencement Speaker, convenes in Tercentenary Theatre on Commencement afternoon. For tickets (which are required, but free) visit the HAA website or call 617-496-7001.

~The Commencement Office