

Short Stories

FROM A LONG JOURNEY

25 YEARS OF GYPSY VANNER HORSE **HISTORY**

A collection by **Dennis Thompson**, GVHS Member, OCALA, FL

A THANKSGIVING TO **REMEMBER**

On November 24th, 1996 Bat and Dolly, North America's first Vanner Horses, arrived in Newburg New York, home of the USDA Quarantine Station, and the last battle of The Revolutionary War.

A rampart in Newburg N.Y. held fifty British Soldiers. A rampart is an encampment of British soldiers (*the ramparts red glare the bombs bursting in air*).

George Washington sent Thomas Jefferson to attack that rampart with four hundred men, soon to be Americans. It was the only battle that Thomas Jefferson ever fought.

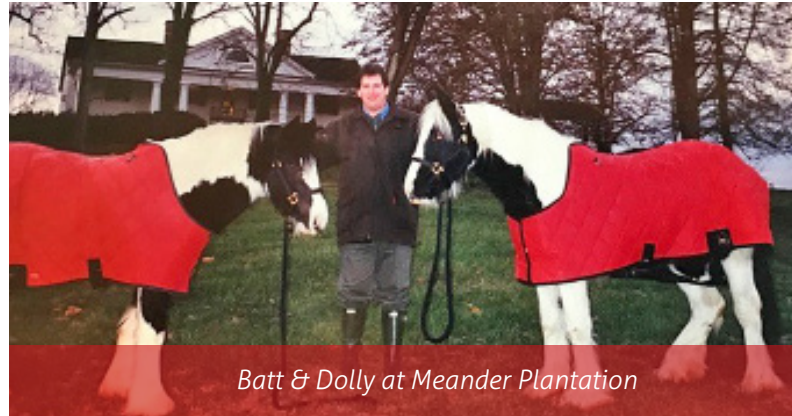
Cindy and I lived in Ocala, Florida then and we were beyond excited to greet North America's first Vanner Horses, so we hooked up a trailer and drove to Newburg N.Y., to pick them up.

Before leaving, we bought the thickest blankets we could, hoods to cover their heads, leg wraps and head bumpers. *Bubble wrapped* best describes how Bat and Dolly looked in their outfits. If an accident occurred, they might bounce a little, but they wouldn't get hurt.

The men at the Quarantine Station said, "*they'd never seen a horse dressed like that before*". It was funny, but ok, Bat and Dolly, were precious cargo.

On our long ride home Cindy found a bed and breakfast in Virginia with stables for Bat and Dolly named Meander Plantation. Meander Plantation was recently opened by a chef and a food critic, both from Chicago. The proprietors of Meander Plantation were awesome hosts, the kind of people you meet once and feel like you've known your entire life.

At 2am, I awoke and thought of an old Gypsy saying: "*Gypsy gold does not chink and glitter, it gleams in the sun and neighs in the dark*." I immediately woke Cindy and said, "*Cindy, our*



Batt & Dolly at Meander Plantation

*new farm name needs to be, **Gypsy Gold**." Cindy said... "go to sleep."*

Early the next morning Cindy and I made a new farm name presentation to the owners of Meander Plantation and they loved it, so a new chapter was ushered in. Our first farm was *Dos Donkeys Y Mas*, inspired by two donkeys and 40 parrots and then, *Pin Tail Farms* inspired by 50 donkeys and 300 animals. In 1996 at Meander Plantation, on Thanksgiving Day, **Gypsy Gold** was born.

On Thanksgiving Day we were to continue our journey back to Ocala. "*Will you join us for Thanksgiving Dinner?*" the chef and the food critic ask. They said, "*there will only be one other family joining you for Thanksgiving dinner, and it was, **The King Ranch**."* They were visiting their son at The Citadel and stayed at Meander Plantation.

The Texas ranch that gave birth to the American Quarter Horse and a Florida farm that founded The Gypsy Vanner Horse Breed sat enjoying Thanksgiving Dinner as the first two Vanners in North America munched hay in an old stone barn once owned by Thomas Jefferson's father.

Yes, Meander Plantation was once Thomas Jefferson's father's home and under his ownership Meander Plantation was called *Elam*, a biblical term meaning seven springs, seven palms, and peace. Cindy loved the number seven.

Meander Plantation always held a special place in our hearts. I recently discovered that Meander Plantation also has an illustrious history with Thoroughbred race horses and the Whippet dog breed. The Meander Whippet is the breed standard for the AKC. It was a Whippet that took second place in, Best Of Show at the 2021 Westminster.

Fascinating history!

"THE LOG": AN AMAZING STORY, REALLY AMAZING!

You've heard this story, but not really!

Cindy and my professional and personal lives were extremely animal centric. International travel included research on animals native to our destinations. In 1995, a Shire filly near London had our interest but we had never imported a horse and needed to know more about Shires. We could be impulsive but also sought to be informed.

Phil Ball, the center's manager owned the filly and Phil told us that, although known as English Shires it was the farmers in Northern Wales who have Shire in their blood.

Always up for an adventure, off we went to Northern Wales for the weekend. Old stone barns, the breath of giant horses, the accents of Welsh farmers and wine and cheese at night. It was awful, but we endured!

Driving back to England, we discussed the cons of owning the world's largest horse and as we crossed the border near Oswestry, England, Cindy said words that are now, Vanner Horse history.

"Did you see that little black and white horse?" Cindy asked.

"No," I replied. "Do you want me to go back?"

"No," she said, followed by, "Yes, let's do."

A simple decision can change your life forever!

The farmer keeping the horse explained that his name was **The Log** and that he belonged to a Traveler and that the man had a band of mares that looked just like The Log that he kept hidden from everyone!



Cindy and I had extensive animal backgrounds, so we knew that you don't have domestic animals that look the same unless someone intends that to happen or the animals are

a landrace breed that develops from natural selection like a mustang.

"Can we meet this man?" I ask.

A call from the farmer summoned a man named Roy Evans. Cordialities complete, Roy invited us to his caravan. As he walked to his vehicle Roy turned and said, "Don't worry. It's respectable."

As Americans that thought never entered our minds. Intrigued, we followed Roy to what is called a caravan site (a Gypsy camp). In time we discovered that in 1968 the British government created *The Caravan Act*, the equivalent of American Indian reservations. One hundred caravan sites, called halt sites in Ireland, are places many Travelers/Gypsies call home. The general public does not enter caravan sites, nor do the police unless in pursuit, hence, Roy's previous words. The site was surrounded by chain link fence.

Roy opened the gate and we entered. Our day consisted of being pampered with tea and cookies by Roy's wife and listening to words of great passion from Roy Evans about his special horse, **The Log**.

"He's a one-off," Roy said. "Look all you want. You won't find any better, and if you do, he's gonna cost you a lot of money. I'll tell you a place where you'll see hundreds of colored horses but none as good as mine. You go there, then you call me after you go there and tell me if you found one as good as mine."

"Don't forget to call me," said Roy Evans.



The Log imported Easter Sunday 1997. Destined to become **Cushti Bok GV00001F**, The Good Luck Horse

PHOTO BY MARK J BARRETT



The next day as we sat on an eight hour flight from London to New York I pondered our chance encounter with The Log and the passionate man with a name like, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans combined! I was 46 and Cindy was 42 then. We lived in Ocala on a three hundred acre farm with approximately seven hundred animals. Yes, you read that right. It's where Pat Parelli lives today. As we sat in silence, my mind pondered, the look of **The Log**, hidden mares, look-alike babies and the passion filled words of Roy Evans.

I turned to Cindy and said, "*Did we just discover a breed of horse? You and me, a couple of freaks.*"

We were late to our wedding because we asked the carriage driver to stop so we could get a closer look at some donkeys. We were animal lovers extreme, in every way! We were not positive on the plane if there was indeed an undiscovered breed of horse, but The Log's babies and their mothers sure did look like him. We could not be sure without more research but we knew some things on that long plane ride home, that were for sure.

Cindy knew with great insight (*I can see her eyes now*) that we should walk toward or away from knowing more about The Log. She knew it could change our lives forever and our lives were special then. We both knew that if we walked toward understanding The Log, we would be entering a culture that didn't invite us. Roy Evans invited us to Appleby Horse Fair to see if we discovered a horse as good as his, but to really understand a breed, if it was indeed, our effort would be much deeper.

We would be an odd couple entering a culture who has been treated poorly for a long time. We didn't know then how long, but we soon discovered. It has been over a 1,000 years. We wanted no part of that. We only wanted our involvement to lift them up and to celebrate what they created.

We somehow knew on that plane ride home that if the look and the feelings it evoked in us could somehow be preserved, the feeling could be used for goodness. Goodness for the people who created it and for humankind in general.

The foundation of the words contained in the original Mission Statement and Goals of the GVHS were born on that long plane ride home.

We didn't walk away, we walked toward understanding The Log and accepted Roy Evans' challenge to find a horse as good as his, and by doing so we became the first Americans to ever attend the world's oldest horse fair for Gypsies (the people) with the sole purpose of developing a better understanding of the colorful people and their special

horses. No, we didn't find a horse better than The Log at Appleby Horse Fair and yes, we called Roy Evans and told him we didn't.

In the years that followed we would trace The Log's genetic history through three countries. All were raised by Gypsies focused on producing a horse with the look of The Log, born from a vision that was inspired by two stallions soon after World War II.

Their vision was to create the perfect caravan horse or Vanner, a horse suitable to pull a caravan. The Log possessed that look and it's a look that could not have happened without focusing on specific genetics (only hairy-legged horses). Their vision and the genetics that created it were unknown outside the world of Gypsies until The Log exposed them.

We stood overlooking the Irish Sea with The Log's DNA verified sire, *The Old Horse of Wales* and Tom Price, the Gypsy who raised him. Tom pointed to a clearing under a tree and said, "*He was born right over there. I will never forget the day he was born. I held him in my arms and I knew he was special. He's the best colt I ever raised.*" Tom had fifteen hundred horses the day we met him but most were not a breed. Most were trade horses raised for the restaurant business in Europe with smooth legged genetics in their background, typically Connemara or Irish Draft.

Trade horses are a type, not a breed, but they can and have fooled untrained eyes. Trade horses have been an obstacle in establishing the Vanner breed as it was intended. You know with only the ones that make your heart skip a beat... the Vanner breed. The Old Horse of Wales was Tom's breed and is clearly one of the Vanner breed's most dynamic sires. Search the internet for a horse going by any name and look for a horse that makes your heart skip a beat. Now do your homework concerning that horse's heritage and see if that horse goes back to The Old Horse Of Wales. If it doesn't, it will have genetics that made The Old Horse of Wales, The Log and all that insist you look at them.

On that day we also discovered that The Log had been the highest prized colt in all of Great Britain at Appleby Horse Fair when Roy Evans bought him as a yearling from Tom for £7,000 British Pounds (\$12,500 US).





WR The Big Son Of Bok, GV03310

A son of *The Log* and a grandson of Patsy McCanns, *The White Horse*.

Cushti Bok... a name that means good luck in the language of Gypsies.

It took two years to buy *The Log* and it happened from America over the phone. Gypsies only deal in cash so I had a problem, I couldn't return to England right then and I desperately wanted to seal the deal, so I took a chance and called Phil Ball, the manager of The Shire Center, and the man who owned the Shire filly that inspired our trip to Northern Wales in the first place.

I said, "Phil, I'm going to send you thousands of dollars, take it in cash to a man named Roy Evans and buy his horse named *The Log*, then please take *The Log* back to The Shire Center and hold him there until we can get him exported to America," and it somehow worked.

When Phil handed Roy the money and Roy handed Phil the lead, with emotion, Roy said to Phil, "**Cushti Bok.**"

That same year we received a Christmas card from Lol and Toni Thompson, Travelers we met at Appleby Horse fair and instantly liked. Lol called me 'cuz' for two decades! All the card said was *Cushti Bok*, a name that means good luck in the language of Gypsies. We thought, that's the *perfect* name for the first of a breed, so on Easter Sunday 1997, *The Log* stepped hooves on American soil to assume his place in equine history as **Cushti Bok, GV00001F, the first selectively bred horse in the world developed by British Gypsies, ever to be recognized as a breed.**

I never saw Roy Evans after the day we met *The Log* in 1995. He was at Appleby, but we never saw him as there were 10,000 Gypsies. I never spoke to Roy Evans again after purchasing *The Log* on the phone in 1997.

Fast forward 24 years, on February 3rd, 2020, at 5:15PM a Facebook message from a man named Billy Evans arrived, and it went like this:

Billy: Hi, was this the farm what bought a Horse called the log from England meny of years ago thanks.

Erin: Yes it is. Dennis Thompson bought him.

Billy: I would really like to talk to Dennis and I have been researching for a while now and I would like to no more about him and have u got any photos of The Log? Am speaking to Dennis and did u bye him off a man called Roy Evans?

Dennis: Yes Billy this is Dennis and yes I bought him from Roy Evans, are you Roy's son?

Billy: No he is my grandad and I have been doing some research just seen was he still alive and where we went to.

Dennis: No Billy, he has passed on and is buried on my farm, he is the first of his breed, your grandad should be very proud.

Billy: How long ago did he die?

Dennis: He died in 2014.

Billy: I have jus added you on fb and I am so happy to find out more about him bez my grandad all ways speaks about the log and tells me about him and I have been look four about 2 months. He was a nice Horse and I think he sold him in 1995. (We saw *The Log* in 95 and bought him in 97.) Me and the wife r thinking about taking the kids to Disney in Florida and if we do I will come to the farm if that's ok.

Dennis: Of course, we would love to have you.

Billy: I will send you a photo tomorrow of *The Log* that me grandad has got over his fire place of *The Log*. It's a good pic me grandad is holding him. My grandad always says the same we all ways speak about *The Log* and me grandad will never take the picture down he say when I die put it in the box with me lol. Ok I will speak to u tomorrow bez I am off to bed now and I will send the pic.



In conclusion, ponder the absurdity that two Americans see one horse in England and that horse's genetics lead them to the origins of an unknown breed.

Ponder the likelihood that the horse's DNA-verified sire is today the DNA sire, grandsire or great grandsire to literally hundreds of the breed's greatest Vanner specimens throughout the world, no matter what someone is calling them. Ponder that the images of two of the best three stallions we ever found are on, or will be in, the graves of the men who owned them.

Pictured Right is 2 year old, **GG Kiss Me Mary, GV07948** (Mary) a daughter of VV King William, GV02650, and GG Velvet Doll GV00518F1. On her sire's side she is a granddaughter of Vintage Vanner's Tessa, GV00052F, and The Gypsy King, GV00012F, a great granddaughter of Governor, GV00267F, and Aisling of Omega, GV01306F, a great great granddaughter of Harkaway Tansy, GV00123F, and The Producer, GV01645F, and a great great great granddaughter of Rinkenni Duchess, GV01237F.

Mary is a granddaughter of Darby Dolly, GV00002F (1st Gypsy Vanner in USA) and Latcho Drom, GV00049F, a great



The White Horse's image along with the image of The White Horse's sire adorns the grave of Patsy McCann. The Log's image (Cushti Bok) will rest with Roy Evans and The Gypsy King's story is yet to be told. They are amazing stories of a passionate culture and their magical Vanner Horses!

Twenty five years ago DNA was not extensive. Today, the GVHS has come a long way! The DNA verified ancestors of the young fillies held by Erin and Dennis Thompson of Gypsy Gold in Ocala, FL.

Pictured left is 3 year old, **GG Taylor-Burton, GV07947** (Liz). On her sire's side, Liz is a daughter of WR The Big Son Of Bok, GV03310 and GG Diamond Girl, GV02901. A granddaughter of Jasmine, GV00005F (*an original GG import, now owned by WR Ranch*) and GV00001, Cushti Bok and a great granddaughter of The Old Horse Of Wales.

Liz is, a daughter of GG Diamond Girl who is a granddaughter of GG Birthday Girl, GV00037F, and Latcho Drom, GV00049F, a great granddaughter of Shampoo Girl, GV00007F, and The Gypsy King, GV00012F. Liz has twenty five years of GVHS, DNA verified genetics with photos of all ancestors.

granddaughter of The Gypsy King and Mary (no DNA on Mary) on her dam's side, and a full sister of GG Kiss Me Kate, GV03449.

Today Dennis and Erin Thompson share History and Horses on their Gypsy Gold farm tours in Ocala Florida. The, hear it, feel it, see it experience of a fateful encounter and the journey to understand a breed and a people has made a Gypsy Gold Farm Tour the #1 Thing To Do in Ocala Florida (a horse capital) #3 of Visitor Favorites in Central Florida (a tourist capital) with Harry Potter #1 and placed the experience in the top 10% of activities for Trip Advisor in the World.

Gypsy Gold is becoming a forever education and cultural center that inspires and educates. The Gypsy Gold, Horses and History experience is destined to not only be a Florida favorite for tourism but also an amazing promotion for you and the Vanner breed.



Through the lens of Mark Barrett...
25 Years of Memories.

Clockwise from below: Latcho Drom GV00049F, Grand Oaks 4-in hand, David Essary driving Esmeralda in vardo, Linda Pepple with Shampoo Girl & foal, Gypsy King & Piper, Gypsy King & Dennis Thompson at beach photoshoot, Vanner Fair 2011

PHOTOS BY: Mark Barrett

