

A sound foundation

Farriers:

“You do the same thing different on every horse”

BY HILARY HOLLADAY

Staff Writer

At his father's urging, Steve Hensley first tried horseshoeing when he was 14 years old. “It was too hot in the middle of summer,” he recalled, so he didn't stick with it.

He tried again when he was 19 and working for Mike Knight, a Montford farmer known for his expertise as a farrier. Hensley apprenticed with Knight and has been working as a farrier ever since.

Part blacksmith, part horse whisperer, a farrier cleans and trims a horse's feet and provides custom-fitted shoes. Farriers also consult with veterinarians to determine how to help lame horses become sound again. (“Sound” is the term used for a healthy horse able to move comfortably.)

Hensley, 31, lives in Somerset and raises cattle in addition to working as a farrier. He said he shoes 250 to 300 horses on a regular basis.

Horsemanship is a key requirement of the job, Hensley noted. A good farrier knows how to approach a horse and when to back off.

“You've got to know how to read their behavior,” he said.

There is only one horse he shoes regularly that he's afraid of: “He's gone somewhere else right now, so I don't have to deal with him.”

Bending over all day to tend to horses' feet is tough on the back and the knees, and Hensley said each farrier has only so many horses in him. He plans to scale back on the number he shoes once he gets to be about 40.

But he likes his work and is happy to discuss the trade, which dates back many centuries. He pointed out there is no computer that can examine a horse's feet and do what a farrier does.

Jeff Rankins: Clients become friends

Jeff Rankins has been a farrier for about 25 years. He was introduced to horses by a girl he dated. When he saw a horse getting shod, he thought, “Hey, I could do that.”

Rankins went to the Eastern School of Farriery, later known as the Danny Ward Horseshoeing School, in Martinsville. Ward, who died in 2018, taught numerous apprentices the trade of farriery.

Once he had learned the trade, Rankins set about building his clientele.

He agrees with an old friend, also a farrier, who once told him that in this line of work, “You don't have clients; you have a whole bunch of friends.”

At 49, Rankins has been shoeing some of the same horses for 20 years. He replaces their shoes every four to six weeks, so he knows those horses and their owners well.

To succeed at the technical side of his job, Rankins said, “You need to be able to look at a foot and keep that visual image in your mind when you make the shoe.”

These days, most farriers use pre-manufactured shoes, but they still must be shaped to fit an individual horse's feet. Rankins keeps an inventory of six to eight different types of shoes, some made of steel and others made of lightweight aluminum.

The Spotsylvania County resident works on show horses, field hunters and rodeo horses, and their shoes must be chosen and fitted with their duties in mind.

Lindsey Reininger, barn manager at Danton Farm, has gotten to know Rankins during his visits to the

Unionville property owned by Michael Kevin and Marisa Murphy.

She said, “Horses all have different feet. A good farrier can see what the horse’s feet need—and do it.”

As Rankins put it, “You do the same thing different on every horse.”

He believes a farrier never stops learning on the job.

“It takes a lifetime to figure out how to do it. You never know everything,” he said philosophically. “When you think you know everything, you’re doing it wrong. You’re working with a live medium that’s constantly changing.”

Anita Leke: The danger of the unexpected

When Anita Leke was growing up in Charlottesville, she loved horses. She took riding lessons through a parks and recreation program and then worked out a deal with her instructor, who allowed her to take lessons at half-price in exchange for cleaning out stalls.

But she never thought she would become a farrier—at least not until she got to Virginia Tech and discovered engineering school was not for her. Determined to do something that interested her more, she dropped out of college and went to horseshoeing school in Oklahoma.

There were not many women learning farriery in 1988, when she was in school, and the field is still dominated by men. Leke and her husband, John Turner, also a farrier, own Crossroads Farriery Supply near Zion Crossroads. She said sometimes customers will assume Turner is the expert in residence, though she has been shoeing horses longer than he has.

With clients stretching from Buckingham County to Orange County, Leke, 52, said she loves driving around the countryside, especially in the fall.

She agrees with her fellow farriers that the work is physically demanding and occasionally dangerous. She had a bad scare one day when a barn cat jumped on the back of a pony whose hind foot she was working on. The pony reared up and pulled Leke to the ground. She didn’t break any bones, but she was sore for a while.

Farriers need someone to hold the horse while they work. Some bring a helper with them, while others rely on the horse’s owner or someone else to keep the horse in place.

“I prefer a warm body around even if it’s not a horse person, because you never know when things are going to go bad,” Leke said.

She remarked that she is especially careful around thoroughbreds, because they react very quickly to flies or any other disturbance: “They can jump four feet sideways at the blink of an eye.”

Miles Herring: The value of apprenticeships

At 23, Miles Herring of Ruckersville is one of the younger farriers working in and around central Virginia. He got interested in the trade when he was a 9-year-old boy riding horses at Oakland Heights Farm, David and Sally Lamb’s horse farm on Route 15 between Orange and Gordonsville.

A farrier shaping horseshoes at Oakland Heights riveted his attention. He asked whether he could accompany the man when he was shoeing horses. For a summer, he earned \$5 for each horse he held while the farrier did his job.

“By the time I was in high school, I was shoeing some,” said the graduate of William Monroe High School in Greene County.

To become adept at the job he loved, he went to horseshoeing school in Oklahoma and then apprenticed with several farriers in Virginia and West Virginia.

All of the farriers interviewed commented on the value of apprenticing in the trade.

“It gives you real-life experiences and gets you underneath the horses,” Herring said. “You can’t learn everything from a book. The best thing for horseshoeing is experience and being able to fix mistakes—fix your own mistakes.”

He added that spending time with experienced farriers is a good way to find clients.

“The best thing to do is get in the truck with guys shoeing horses for a long time and [who] are well known. That gets your face out there. If you work under a guy that everybody likes, that’ll help you out.”

He added that new farriers can’t afford to be picky. “You gotta do the horses that no one else wants to do. You get beat up. You do some nasty ones,” he said. “Some horses don’t want to be shod. They don’t want to deal with you.”

Although a testy horse can be tranquilized, that is not always an option, and even a typically calm one can have an off day.

Herring said he has been bitten on the job. “Every now and then, they’ll nip you in the back.”

But many of the horses he shoes are well behaved. And while the job is definitely hard work, he said, “Getting a horse and shoeing it and making it better than it was before—that’s probably the most rewarding part.”

He also delights in knowing he “had a little part in it” when horses he has shod do well in competitions.

A house without a foundation is like ...

On a recent day, Herring was shoeing a cutting horse named Rose, a boarder at Elmwood Farm on Rapidan Road.

While Michaela McDonough held Rose, Herring demonstrated the art and science of trimming a hoof and fitting it with a new shoe. He said horses have no feeling in their hooves, just as people have no feeling in fingernails and toenails.

After removing an old shoe from Rose’s right hind foot, he trimmed the hoof down to the “waxy” part and then heated up the new shoe in his portable propane forge. When the shoe was red-hot, he banged it into shape on his anvil.

Wearing no gloves, his breath visible in the cold air, he knew exactly how long he wanted the shoe to be so it would help ease a stiffness he’d noticed in Rose’s hock—a joint in the hind leg.

He checked the fitted shoe against her foot to determine if he needed to make further adjustments. Once everything looked good, he hammered it into place, using three nails on each side of the shiny new shoe.

Because the inserted nails jut out of the hoof wall, he clinched them down and filed the surface. Pointing to the shoe’s beveled edge, he said that helps prevent the horse from getting tripped up.

Herring works five to six days a week and tends to about 10 horses every day. He typically spends 45 minutes to an hour on each one.

The way Herring tells it, the reason he devotes so much time and thought to the part of the horse closest to the ground is obvious.

“If you don’t have a foundation, you don’t have a house,” he said by way of analogy. “If you don’t have a foot, you don’t have a horse.”

Pursuing inner happiness

Lama shares Buddhist teachings in Orange

BY HILARY HOLLADAY

Staff Writer

His name is Ngawang Tashi Bapu, and he is a Tibetan Buddhist lama. His title indicating his stature as a high-ranking spiritual leader, Lama Tashi is not as incongruous a presence as one might expect as he walks around the spacious living room at Piedmont, a 19th-century estate in Rapidan. Wearing a crimson robe over a golden shirt, he radiates peace; he is at ease, at home. His smile is incandescent.

Before sitting down for an interview last Friday morning, the lama served tea and cookies baked in honor of the Lunar New Year (or Chinese New Year). Karla Baer, the owner of Piedmont, said she watched in fascination as her houseguest made the dough, let it rise and then twisted it into whimsical shapes. The cookies were chewy, not too sweet and perfect with a cup of strong tea.

Tashi listened patiently as his and Baer's mutual friend, Lyle Sanford, provided the back story for his visit. The two men met in 1992 when Sanford was working as a music therapist in San Antonio and a group of Buddhist monks stayed in the house where he lived. Tashi was a member of the group performing "deep voice" chanting, dances and debates as part of a "Sacred Music, Sacred Dance" fundraising tour for a Buddhist monastery in India. He and Sanford became acquainted and have been in touch ever since.

When Sanford moved home in 1993 to care for his parents, Lama Tashi began visiting him periodically in Orange County. Now that Tashi has left a

demanding administrative post he held in India, he has more time to visit family in the U.S. and catch up with American friends, including Sanford.

But Tashi, who turns 50 on February 22, is not leading a life of leisure: far from it.

He intends to bring a distilled version of Buddhist teachings, free of deities, to the U.S., starting in Orange. He and Sanford are still figuring out the best way to describe what Tashi wants to teach. Sanford calls it a form of "mind training" and says the working title for his friend's series of talks is "Building Inner Happiness."

A "strong connection with the spiritual world"

The youngest of nine children, Tashi grew up in Arunachal Pradesh, a state in northeast India—an area that China claims is part of Tibet. His parents owned a large farm where they raised horses, cows and sheep. His grandfather was a spiritual master, and his father was a prominent spiritual teacher and astrologer who performed rituals throughout the region.

As a young boy, Tashi said, he felt a "strong connection with the spiritual world." In the evenings after dinner, his sisters spun wool and other family members did woodwork. His father told stories about the history of the region and of their family. He also told spiritual stories with morals to them.

His face lit with the memory, Lama Tashi said the storytelling went on for hours every night. That wasn't all that happened. Tashi's brothers and sisters sang and danced, and people from surrounding villages came to listen and watch.

Nicknamed Nyu nyu ("Baby"), young Tashi drank it all in—the stories, the singing and dancing, the mesmerized audience.

When he was 10 years old, his father died. In the face of profound loss, the family stayed close and supportive of one another.

In 1983, the Dalai Lama came to Tashi's home region. The global leader of Buddhism shared his teachings. He and the monks accompanying him chanted and participated in philosophical debates. Young Tashi loved all of it.

"I thought maybe I should go with this lifestyle," he said.

With the encouragement of his mother and siblings, the teenage boy began studying at the Drepung Loseling Monastery in Karnataka, India, home to more than 3,000 monks. To earn the academic degree called “geshe,” he spent 20 years studying ancient Buddhist philosophy, linguistics and chanting rituals. (More recently, he said, Buddhist monasteries have condensed the geshe program into 16 or 17 years.)

Lama Tashi is renowned for his chanting, a deep, resonant thrumming that sounds like it comes from the core of the earth rather than a man’s throat. His album, “Tibetan Master Chants,” was nominated for a Grammy award in 2006. He was the first Buddhist monk nominated for the prestigious industry honor.

For many years, Tashi was principal and director of the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Dahung, India. Now that he has left that position, he is concentrating on making Buddhist practice more accessible to Westerners. To that end, he and a friend from India have developed an app that features breathing exercises, meditations, affirmations and Tashi’s chantings. The “Heal My Life” app is available from the Apple App Store and Google Play.

The dharma comes to Orange

While in Orange, Lama Tashi is leading a series of Saturday afternoon talks at the Music Room on Main Street. He describes it as a pilot project allowing him to test out his streamlined approach to the dharma—the ancient teachings at the heart of Buddhism.

Each of the first three talks has attracted more than 20 participants. Sanford said Buddhists don’t proselytize, so he sent an email to people he thought might be interested rather than widely advertising the talks, which are free and open to all.

Last Saturday, Tashi began his presentation by making three key observations.

First of all, he told his listeners that people need to be less selfish while still loving and caring for themselves.

“When we talk about reducing selfishness, that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have any self interests,” he said. “If we want to have compassion toward

others, we must have compassion toward ourselves.”

Second, he said, “If you engage yourself for the welfare of many other beings, that will give you more satisfaction than caring for yourself only.”

Third, he stressed the importance of “rejoicing” and celebrating one’s own and other people’s merits.

In a nod toward the American style of personal revelation, he confessed he had been happy for a long time and had few difficulties in life. But then something terrible happened.

“When you’re hit with a rock,” he said, without revealing the nature of his traumatic experience, “you learn something new.”

He went back to the ancient teachings he had studied for decades with fresh eyes. He realized happiness, by which he means a sense of lasting, calm peacefulness rather than ephemeral delight, must begin from within.

“Once you’re happier—better to yourself, better to others—you’re safe from yourself and less harmful to others,” he said.

But how do you get there?

For Lama Tashi, the process begins with steadying both the body and the mind. With some eyes in the Music Room on him and others cast toward their laps, he performed a “deep throat” chant that pushed aside quotidian thoughts or at least made their dull repetitiveness obvious and less personal.

He spoke of “wind energy” that flows with every inhalation and exhalation. He led the group in simple breathing exercises that required sitting up straight.

He shared English translations of ancient Buddhist teachings whose meanings began to unfold as he discussed and rephrased them.

One of them read:

*Some when they see their own blood
Become especially brave and steady,
But some when they see the blood of
others
Faint and fall unconscious.*

He explained that when something harmful happens, “we should make our mind strong like the

brave warrior.” The idea seems to be that the trained, tough mind doesn’t get bogged down in anger and conflict.

“If you can’t save yourself, you can’t save others”

“It doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do anything to protect yourself,” Tashi said in response to an audience member’s request for further commentary. “If you can’t save yourself, you can’t save others.”

But responding to an angry, hate-filled person with more anger only makes a bad situation worse, he explained. Like a rattled warrior, one runs the risk of missing one’s target and drawing others into a vortex of harm.

He admitted not everyone will be receptive to a Buddhist approach to conflict resolution. In that case, he said, let the situation go: Perhaps in a few years, one can revisit it with greater enlightenment.

Lama Tashi is the first to admit his streamlined approach to the basic tenets of Buddhist practice is a work in progress. He plans to come back to Orange in September or October to continue his teaching and see how his local students have fared in the intervening months. He wants an open exchange of ideas and is eager to know what he is getting across clearly and what needs clarification.

After his most recent talk, people in the audience offered enthusiastic comments. Retired music teacher Judy Peterson said, “I’m trying to learn a positive way of living. It’s good to be around someone like him.”

Historian Deborah Lee of Stanardsville said she has studied Buddhism in the past. She was grateful for Lama Tashi’s talk, which took her away, literally and figuratively, from a challenging writing project. “It’s just what I need to shift my perspective and help the flow,” she said. “It will help me get out of my own way.”

Filmmaker Richard Knox Robinson of Orange was one of the more prepared members of the audience. He lived with a Tibetan family during an undergraduate semester abroad in Nepal, studied Tibetan medicine and even met the Dalai Lama.

As for Lama Tashi, Robinson said, “I like him. It’s fun to have him here.”

The opportunity to hear a revered Tibetan leader’s dharma talk at the Music Room, a short walk from his home on Chapman Street, did not strike him as all that unusual. Reflecting the sort of happy mind that Lama Tashi advocates, Robinson said, “If you just wait long enough, everything will come to Orange.”

Weather permitting, Lama Tashi will continue giving his dharma talks for those interested every Saturday from February 23 through March 9 in the Music Room, 135 E. Main St., Orange. Doors open at 2:30 and the talk begins at 3 p.m. For more information, contact Lyle Sanford at themusicroomonmain@gmail.com.

A firefighter's survival story

A year later, Arnold reflects on his harrowing experience

BY HILARY HOLLADAY
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At the Rapidan Volunteer Fire Department's annual banquet in March, the room went still when the time came to honor Shannon Arnold.

Ryan Smith read a tribute by Brian Foster describing the day a year earlier when Arnold was electrocuted while fighting a fire.

"March 2, 2018, was a day I will never forget. Mother Nature was at her finest, not to mention it was banquet day, with the wind destroying everything it could," Smith, a young firefighter, read on Foster's behalf.

A somber Foster stood behind the teenage boy and held on to a wooden Maltese cross symbolizing a firefighter's courage and willingness to put his life on the line while battling a fire. The carving, which Smith had made for Arnold, was signed by every member of the Rapidan Volunteer Fire Department (RVFD).

Ashley Lilly, president of the RVFD and Arnold's fiancée, looked on while Smith read and Foster wiped his eyes. A few moments later, the crowd erupted in applause when Arnold, smiling and looking sharp in his dress uniform, stepped forward to receive the cross and a round of bear hugs from his fellow volunteers.

"A good day for brush fires"

Arnold, Lilly and Foster sat down in the fire hall recently to recount the dramatic day that started out happily and then swerved perilously close to tragedy.

On that bright March morning, Arnold and Foster were working at the fire department on Route 614 and looking forward to the tight-knit group's banquet that night. Lilly was getting her nails done in Culpeper.

Arnold, 34, had a feeling he and the rest of the gang would get a workout before they sat down to a bountiful meal and a night of awards and fond tributes.

"It was a good day for brush fires," said the Unionville resident.

The ground was wet with rain, but now the sun was out, the temperature was rising and the wind was strong. It was the sort of day trees knock against power lines and fall to the ground. The next thing you know, a spark catches and a fire breaks out.

Arnold's instincts were right. Inside the fire department, the tones signaling a call to the Rapidan unit sounded. There was a brush fire in Indiantown, between True Blue and Flat Run.

Friends since elementary school, Arnold and Foster jumped in Brush 10, the two-man truck the company uses for brush fires, and headed out.

They extinguished the fire in Indiantown and then got a call to River Road in Rapidan. Before they arrived, word came that other firefighters had that blaze under control.

The next call came from Lake of the Woods. Arnold and Foster sped toward the eastern end of the county and helped put out a major fire there.

"I lost where I was"

Dressed in protective outerwear called bunker gear, Arnold was drenched with sweat and water that had blown back on him from the fire hose.

"I was wet to my drawers, and my gloves were wet. Everything was wet," Arnold recalled.

Desperate for dry underwear, he asked Foster to stop at Walmart in Locust Grove. The brief shopping trip gave him the last lighthearted moment of the day.

"I walked in there with my bunker gear on, and they looked at me like I was crazy, but I went in there and got me a pack of underwear," he said with a grin.

He and Foster were headed back to the station when another call came in. Someone at a home on Rapidan Road, not far from Cedar Mountain Stone in Mitchells, had spotted billowing white smoke.

Foster and Arnold went to the residence, but the fire was some distance away. Their fire chief, Mike Smith (Ryan Smith's father), told them to take a road near the quarry.

That road gave them the access they needed, but they still couldn't get their truck close to the blaze. After assessing the situation on foot, they returned to Brush 10 and gathered up their tools.

It was on this second trip, as they walked along the edge of the woods, that Arnold was struck. Although he was not close to the downed power line that had started the fire, a forceful current surged through the ground and hit him.

"I didn't fall to the ground, by no means. It kind of buckled me a little bit, not much. But then I lost where I was. I was kind of dazed," Arnold said.

"I hollered for Brian. He was talking to Chief [Smith] on the radio, so I hollered for him again. I said, 'Brian, I think I just got bit.'"

By "bit," he meant electrocuted.

Foster, an electrician by trade, responded forcefully.

"I said, 'Get out. Just drop what you got. I'll handle it; get out of here.'"

Arnold did as instructed. Foster stayed in the woods and fought the fire. The whole time, he kept wondering about his friend, "What happened? What happened? What happened?"

"I couldn't move"

The fire behind the quarry was growing. Reinforcements were called, and Lilly was aboard the next fire truck from Rapidan.

She didn't know Arnold was injured until she got there: "When I saw Shannon, I knew something wasn't right."

Arnold knew it, too. "I could actually feel my heart in my chest. I could hear it, and I couldn't get my breath," he said.

"Then [the shock] started going down my body. Everything started getting numb and my feet—my feet started tingling. Then, by the time the ambulance got there, I couldn't move."

Foster later estimated the voltage of the downed power line was 19,000 volts. He said the residual electricity from the line traveled across the wet ground and found a receptacle in Arnold, whose clothes and boots were still wet.

By now, Arnold's body temperature had plummeted. Fellow firefighters put him in a truck and turned on the heater. Suddenly, EMTs were trying to get him out of his bunker gear. The removal of his boots was so painful that he screamed in agony.

The fire raged on. Rappahannock Electric and the Virginia Department of Forestry were summoned. Heavy equipment operators and foremen from Cedar Mountain Stone pitched in with rakes and fire extinguishers.

Finally, the situation was under control. Lilly, Foster and the other firefighters from Rapidan got back on Route 615 and headed toward their station. All thoughts were on Arnold, who had been taken to Culpeper Medical Center.

From the hospital, Arnold told Lilly to stay at the fire hall and run the banquet as planned.

"That was my will," he said, his characteristically cheerful expression turning serious.

Lilly understood. She knew she had a job to do. Master of ceremonies and RVFD treasurer Gary Jones mentioned Arnold's accident to the crowd, but the banquet went on as planned. Lilly presented awards to firefighters at the station she has loved ever since she was toddler going there with her family. All the while, her mind was on Arnold, the father of her young daughter, Maci.

"You've got to keep pushing"

After the banquet ended and the crowd dispersed, the Rapidan crew went downstairs to their headquarters and waited for an update. Finally, around 11 p.m., Arnold told Lilly he was being transferred to the VCU Medical Center in Richmond.

On the way to Richmond, an exhausted Arnold fell asleep, only to be repeatedly awakened by an EMT asking whether he was OK. He said he was concerned because Arnold's heart was skipping beats.

At VCU, the irregular heartbeat continued, and doctors asked him if he had a pacemaker. The answer was no. It turned out he was still experiencing shocks, even though he'd been electrocuted many hours earlier.

Arnold learned there was nothing doctors could do other than monitor his condition. His initial heart problems and shortness of breath eventually went away, but he still suffers from weakness on his right side—the side that absorbed the shock. Doctors told him lifting weights would not help, because his damaged blood vessels aren't able to expand and accommodate the blood needed to strengthen his muscles.

But Arnold is a tough young man. When Lilly offered him a plate of banquet food in his hospital room the night of the accident, he ate it. The next day, he went by the fire department so his friends would know he was OK. That Monday, he was back at Marshall Dairy Farm in Unionville, where he has worked since he was 15 years old.

"That was my choice to go back and see what I can do," Arnold said, noting he could've taken time off if he had wanted to. The injury "does affect my ability to work on the farm. But I keep pushing myself. You've got to keep pushing."

"God was on my side"

He has learned to rely on his left arm and come up with new ways to do old chores. He still runs calls for the fire department. And he and Lilly now have a son, 3-month-old Landon, in addition to Maci, age 3.

He is grateful rather than bitter. "I tell you," he said, "God was on my side."

Foster said when he emerged from the fire and found out his best friend had been taken away in an ambulance, he thought, "It's not fair."

Arnold's accident stayed on his mind the whole year before he wrote the tribute that accompanied the presentation of the Maltese cross. He said he wrote 10 pages before editing it down to a more manageable length.

"Even sitting there typing the whole thing, it hurt. But the good side of this is, he's here with me today," he said. "God was actually looking after us

that day. He was. And I couldn't ask for anything better."