Edward "Ned" Bonnie marched across the Devon showgrounds, purpose clear in every step. The horse show swirled around the young lawyer from Kentucky, the Ferris wheel turning on the midway while elegant hunters took their turn in the ring and society’s finest hung on the rail.

Bonnie was oblivious to it all, cutting across the arenas, intent on his mission. But when famed Virginia trainer A.E. "Gene" Cunningham stopped him to say hello, he paused momentarily.

"He asked, ‘Ned what are you doing here?’" recalled Bonnie. "I said, ‘I’m going to try to get the American Horse Shows Association to write a drug rule and enforce it so there’s a level playing field.’ He said, ‘You might as well turn around and go back to Kentucky because you’re never going to get that done.’"

Undeterred, Bonnie continued his trek toward the AHSA executive meeting on the other side of the Gold Ring. He made his presentation to Marge McDonald, who was the head of the Hunter Committee at the time, and she surprised him.

“She said, ‘We know it’s happening, and we don’t think it should continue to happen. We’re going to try to sell your proposal at the national board meeting in New York in January,’” recalled Bonnie. "I was encouraged by that."

Not only did AHSA officials listen to Bonnie, they soon asked him to re-write the drug rules and hired him to enforce them. President Albert E. Hart Jr. signed off on a stringent new drug rule on May 16, 1970, and put together a Drugs and Medication Committee.

To this day, Bonnie remains an active presence in horse sport governance. His most visible role has been that of tireless advocate for a fair playing field when it comes to drugging and medication. In addition to his efforts with the rules, he went on to chair the Drugs and Medication Committee in the ‘90s. When the U.S. Equestrian Federation faced negative publicity after the death of a pony under suspicious circumstances at the Devon Horse Show (Pa.) made the front page of The New York Times in...
2012, Bonnie was there, demanding the USEF take action. “Our drug testing system is inadequate to catch all the cheaters,” he said.

“The Lance Armstrong case is a classic example of the inadequacy of drug testing. He beat the deal because they beat the labs. This is not unique to the game. How do we change that? There are additional facts that can be brought to bear that the laboratory is not capable of producing. How can we do a better job getting the information, which would then be presented to the Hearing Committee?”

And after he’d asked those questions, he went to work re-writing the rules once again.

An Affinity For Animals
Bonnie didn’t start with horse roots, but as a child he made every attempt to turn his parents’ small Louisville, Ky., property into a working farm.

“I had calves, pigeons, chickens, rabbits and horses,” he said. “By the time I was 13 or 14, I’d accumulated one pony, one work horse that cost me $30, and a Thoroughbred that cost me $20.”

Bonnie’s son Robert recalled a favorite family tale of Ned’s childhood. “He was always going to the stockyards and buying a calf, and bringing it home. He’d swapped it for some chickens. Then he swapped the calf for a pony, and he brought it home in the station wagon. I kid you not. He brings the pony home in the station wagon, and on the way home the pony ate the inside of the station wagon.”

“My family could see the handwriting on the wall,” said Ned. “They determined to send me off to school to see if they could break my equine habit. They were unsuccessful.”

Educated at the Hotchkiss School (Conn.) and Yale University (Conn.), Bonnie joked about spending 10 years in Connecticut to get his “educational veneer.” But even then horses were never far out of the picture. There’s a photo of him in the Hotchkiss yearbook reading The Blood-Horse.

Ned spent his summers riding and showing hunters. He returned to Louisville in 1955 after earning his law degree at Yale. He clerked for Judge Henry Brooks in the Federal District Court for the Western District of Kentucky before going to work for Brown and Eldred, a firm of 10 lawyers, which ultimately expanded to 450 lawyers in five states (today known as Frost Brown Todd LLC).

But it didn’t take long for him to find a way to fit horses into his life. He began galloping race horses at Churchill Downs before work.

“I saw the racing industry from the backside of the racetrack,” said Ned. “I kind of bonded with the exercise boys, the trainers, the grooms. I became familiar with what the racetracks were doing for the horsemen and to the horsemen, and how the racing commissions fit into that scenario. I took a job with my law practice as secretary treasurer of the Kentucky Horseman’s Benevolent Protection Association and as their lawyer.”

He also stayed connected to the horse show world, as his wife, Cornelia or “Nina,” was accomplished in the hunter ring. Her mother was Mrs. A.C. Randolph, longtime MFH for Piedmont Fox Hounds (Va.) and an incredible horsewoman in her own right.

“The horse shows had gone from two days a week to four, five and six days a week, and that didn’t fit into my law practice at all,” said Ned. “So my wife went to the horse shows while I galloped Thoroughbreds and became a steeplechase rider, trainer and owner.”

He also foxhunted, and he was a JL MFH of Long Run Hounds (Ky.) for 25 years, retiring in 2013.

There weren’t really equine specialists in the legal industry at that time, but Ned decided to make a niche for himself.

“I saw there was an opportunity in the horse business to represent interested parties in the business,” he said. “Owners having disputes with trainers, buyers and sellers, disputes with race tracks, disputes with racing commissions. There was an opportunity for a lawyer who was a horseman to make a living representing those interests.”

And in 1968, a case arose that called for exactly Ned’s unique skill set. Dancer’s Image, the winner of the Kentucky Derby, had tested positive for phenylbutazone after the race.

“In Kentucky, and maybe anywhere, I knew more about how to try a drugging case than anybody else because I had tried two or three cases representing defendants, charged parties, trainers and owners,” said Ned.

Along with Arthur Grafton and Stuart Lampe, Ned spent the next four years defending the colt’s owner, Peter Fuller. The story made the headlines of every major newspaper at the time and inspired a book by Milton Toby.

“He’s been on both sides, and as a result he understands the importance of alliances and being able to talk to folks on all sides of the issue,” said Robert (right) of his father Ned (left), pictured here along with his other son, Shelby.

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HORSE CARE

For the Bonnie family, leisure time has always been spent with horses, and grandchildren Mason (top), Virginia (bottom left) and Henry can enjoy the same farm their parents grew up on in Prospect, Ky., when they visit their grandparents, Ned and Nina Bonnie.

They ultimately lost, and Dancer’s Image became the only winning horse ever disqualified from the Kentucky Derby. But that case changed drug testing and due process in racing forever.

“For the first time, a chemist was no longer allowed to come in and just say, ‘Hocus pocus, it’s positive,’ ” said Ned. “He had to prove that it was positive, and there were standards that had been violated by this particular chemist [who tested Dancer’s Image’s samples]. Those standards were important to the entire industry. The techniques of announcing positives had to be changed. The hearing process had to be in accordance with constitutional state and federal due process guarantees.”

From Black Hat To White
While Ned initially made his name defending a horse that had tested positive, it wasn’t long before going after the cheaters became his chief mission.

Nina showed regularly in the hunters in Kentucky, and Ned accompanied her on the weekends.

“It became apparent to me that we had nice Thoroughbred horses,” Ned said. “We were reasonably competent trainers. We were getting beat regularly at these horse shows around Kentucky. I finally turned to [Nina] and said, ‘You know what? I don’t think we’re getting beat on the level.’ She said, ‘What do you mean?’ I said, ‘I think these horses that we’re competing with are being tranquilized.’ ”

Transquilizing was a common practice, with some of the biggest barns sending out the majority of their horses under the influence of one drug or another. So Ned went to the Kentucky Hunter Jumper Association and told them he’d write a drug rule that they could enforce using testing similar to post-race testing. But once he’d written the rule, most of the show managers left the association rather than lose the business from the horse trainers.

Not one to give up without a fight, Ned went to the national level, heading to Devon to speak to the leaders of the AHSA.

“I’m mouthy, but that’s my role,” he said with a grin. “That’s how I practice law.”

So Ned went from defense attorney to prosecutor.

While many people applauded and helped with Ned’s anti-doping crusade, others were less impressed. “I made enemies of all the leading hunter/jumper and saddle horse professionals,” he said. “The saddle horse guys were hopscotching their horses, and the hunter/jumper trainers were tranquilizing theirs. I prosecuted George Morris twice, and his last lawyer said he was going to undress me and my law firm. Fortunately, he was wrong.”

Robert remembered his family hiring a guard at shows. “We had our tack stolen one year;” he said. “There was always concern that someone might sprinkle a little something in Merlin’s feed. Merlin was a really nice horse my mother had. But I didn’t think anything, that’s just sort of the way it was. Dad was always involved in those issues.”

When he was working on the Dancer’s Image case, he was threatened with disbarment twice; the horse show community was no less menacing. In the 1970s, reserpine was the tranquilizer of choice because there wasn’t a test for it. But in 1978, the AHSA developed one and started testing. In 60 days, 23 positives came back, including horses

“I The only reason I haven’t been killed is that I’m a little too high profile.”

—NED BONNIE

The Chronicle of the Horse
As a child, Robert Bonnie spent countless hours at equine events, and he can't remember ever going somewhere in the horse world where his family wasn't known. Between Ned Bonnie, prominent equine lawyer, and Nina, prominent horse trainer, plus Nina's deep Virginia equestrian roots, it didn't matter whether you were at the Kentucky Derby or Devon Horse Show (Pa.), you always had a lot of friends.

"We grew up in Prospect, Ky.,” said Robert. “At the time, it was fairly rural. It's still pretty rural, but now there's a Starbucks within 15 minutes, so it's less rural than it used to be. The family farm is still there. We'd have a couple of race horses, and Mom always had two or three horses she was showing and another couple of horses coming through that were projects to sell. My brother and I always had a pony or two. Mom would have a broodmare. Later on, she had a flat horse or two. On the other side of the farm, we always had a herd of cattle. There was a proper agricultural business. We spent a good amount of time throwing hay into the barn."

Leisure time generally included a horsey activity of some sort, whether that was watching Dad riding in a point-to-point, showing ponies alongside Mom, foxhunting with Piedmont (Va.) or taking horseback family vacations out West. But the Bonnie children, Shelby and Robert, were never pushed to become horsemen.

"My dad was and still is a very hard worker,” said Robert. “He'd come home at 6:30 or 7 at night. He'd always work a half a day on Saturday. It was balanced in that he had an outside life, but his whole law practice was related to horses. My dad was in the barn in the morning and at the law firm in the afternoon, but it's all stuff he cared deeply about. The lesson for us was that if you can find a career path that marries your interest and your career, that's a very rewarding life."

For Robert, that meant exploring his passion for conservation. He's currently the U.S. Department of Agriculture undersecretary for natural resources and the environment, having first worked for the Environmental Defense Fund for 14 years and then as a senior policy advisor at the USDA.

But horses remain part of his life. His wife, Julie Gomena, is a steeplechase trainer and former upper-level event rider. "I married a woman who is like the son my parents never had,” Robert joked. “My getaway on weekends, ironically enough, is to go to horse races and those sort of things. I didn't move away from it. I've always loved horses, always loved racing and horse showing. The career path I took [just] pulled me away from those things during the week."

And the same is true of Shelby, who is an entrepreneur, currently working as the managing director of Allen & Company. He previously founded CNET and sold it to CBS. He splits his time between San Francisco and Upperville, Va., where he's an MPH with Piedmont, following in the footsteps of his famous grandmother, A.C. Randolph. He and wife Carol have three children: Mason, Henry and Virginia.

belonging to some of the biggest-name trainers in the business. Dick McDevitt, who was president of the AHSA at the time and a prominent attorney in Philadelphia, had helped Ned get the drug rules written and adopted. He had his barn burned down for his troubles.

"They threatened to kill our horses at a show in St. Louis,” recalled Ned. "The people in Chicago, who were a rough bunch, I knew them, so I called them up and said, 'I understand you all are going to either hurt or kill our horses when my wife shows up in St. Louis.' This guy said, 'Oh, Ned, you know we wouldn't do that.' I said, 'Let me just tell you, if it happens, you're going to be the first stop. I'm coming after you.' As you might imagine nothing happened."

"It wasn't an easy road,” Ned continued. "I'm kind of a stubborn SOB. The only reason I haven't been killed is that I'm a little too high profile."

The Rules Guru

While fighting drugging in the horse show world may be part of Ned's legacy, it certainly isn't all of it. Together with James C. Wofford, who was AHSA president from 1988-1991, he helped change the AHSA from an association of horse shows where show managers had most of the power to an individual membership.

"That was, at the time, a wrenching change and vehemently disagreed with by show managers," said Wofford. "For obvious reasons, because before that they were able to make rules that suited them."

"The little guy, the person with one horse who wants to go to the show, have a good time, and compete on a level playing field, has no better friend than Ned Bonnie," continued Wofford. "He'll make sure that the rules are enforced and that the richest person in the world does not get a different set of rules applied to them than those applied to some person shipping their own horse and taking care of it."

When it came to rule changes of any sort, Ned was the man who made it happen. Kathy Meyer, now the USEF senior vice president of marketing and communications, started her journey with the national governing body as a professional Arabian horse trainer who felt the people in government were too far removed from the show ring. Don Burt, who was the vice president of the AHSA at the time, introduced her to Ned.

"If you're writing rules, he's the man who understands showing," Burt told Meyer. "This is the person who can help guide you in crafting positions and advancing your platform."

Meyer took her agenda from the Arabian Professional Horsemen's Association to Ned.
“You would sit with Ned, and he had a legal-sized notepad,” recalled Meyer. “He would write with a mechanical pencil. You would talk about what you were trying to accomplish, and he would write it all down. The pencil lead would break about every 10th word. He would write on every other line, and he would write this out. Whatever the concept was, whatever the rule, the brief would be crafted to present the arguments for whatever the issue at hand was.”

Then Ned would send you off with talking points to convince the people you needed to get on your side in order to achieve your objective.

“He would just chart the path, the strategic path, that you needed to take in the hallways in delivering your proposal or concept,” said Meyer. “It was like going to university again as far as understanding strategic delivery and politics. It was really taking whatever the concept was and building it out. You would be able to defend it on every level and then talk people into it and deliver it at the end.”

A Defender Of The Horse
And Ned hasn't contained his rule-writing and legal involvement to sport horses.

“There is not an issue that dealt with the betterment of horses, racing or non-racing, that doesn't have Ned's fingerprints on it in the past 50 years,” said Wofford.

He and Nina were honored with the 2005 First USA Bank/USA Equestrian Lifetime Achievement Award for their uncommon devotion to the sport of horse showing.

Most recently, Ned's been very involved with legislation regarding horse soring in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry and drugging in race horses.

“We've got the USEF in reasonably good shape in terms of policy of control and penalty,” he said regarding the drugs and medication violations. “That's not the case in racing. I'm in the middle of that war as we speak.”

At 84 years old, Ned is a vocal advocate of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2013, a bill that would provide national oversight and penalties to curb drugging and over-medication in racing. Whereas he once thought the racing industry could solve the problem from within, he's changed his mind.

“We're not going to straighten it out after 30 years of trying,” he said. “I'm for federal intervention. Use them as a Sword of Damocles for the 38 states that don't have the money to have the investigatory staff they need, that don't have the money to do the sophisticated research to find the drugs that they are using.”

In the 1970s, he was tasked with prosecuting a horse-soring misconduct case for the AHSA. A good friend took him to a Tennessee Walking Horse barn to educate him. “He showed me how they wrapped the horses' legs with oil of mustard, just terrorized these horses and hurt them, literally,” recalled Ned. “I prosecuted the case successfully; at which point the Walking Horse people resigned from the AHSA. I've had an abiding interest in that issue of being a horseman.”

Now Ned works with the Friends Of Sound Horses group, an education and advocacy group for Tennessee Walking Horses and other gaited horses, and he's a proponent of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act that would amend the Horse Protection Act to ban the use of devices implicated in the practice of soring, strengthen penalties, and make other reforms.

And he's not afraid to accept help, from whatever quarter, in his battles. While some horsemen eye the Humane Society of the United States as a radical
animal rights organization with an anti-horse owner agenda, Ned commended them for their work to expose abuse in the TWH industry.

"They sent that undercover guy to Jackie McConnell's barn and took that video of him beating that horse with that stick, hitting him with a stock prod. That went viral," said Ned. "I think that Senate bill is going to have success. Who's going to vote against it, other than a guy who was bought and paid for? I don't agree with everything HSUS does. But I've joined with them in the Walking Horse business. Everybody has good points and bad points. I'm prepared to take a little and give a little."

That pragmatic approach is part of what has made him such a successful advocate for the horse.

"He's been on both sides, and as a result he understands the importance of alliances and being able to talk to folks on all sides of the issue," said son Robert. "On the other hand, there are issues he's absolutely passionate about, with horse soring or drugging, where he is a very strong advocate. He'll engage folks on it, but he'll stand up for what he believes is right."

And when Ned gets passionate, he stands on integrity, not righteousness, to make his point.

"Practically everybody sitting at that table for the Board of Directors of the Federation is ultimately conflicted," said Meyer. "They're arguing for some rule that will make their life better, or their competition better, or their competitive edge sharper. That's their motive, that's why they're involved. Time after time, Ned will just see right through it and will call that person out, but not in a negative or nasty way. 'Explain to me why what you're proposing serves not only you and your property but the whole of equestrian sport?' He'll just stop these people in their tracks and make them look in the mirror."

Ned is careful never to make his criticisms personal. "It is always the issues or the principles," said Meyer. "Even though he makes you so angry, or you disagree with the position he's taken—you can be frustrated, but you can't be angry because he never personalizes it."

"He's got an incredible amount of integrity and high ethical standards," said Robert. "His personal integrity is just unparalleled. That was incredibly important growing up around him. It wasn't something that he spent a lot of time preaching about, but it was something that you just saw and absorbed."

But if you ask Ned why he does it, why he's worked tirelessly for the horse for his entire career, the answer is simple.

"I'm a horseman," he said. "I ride every day. I'm a horse whisperer. I've read all the books, and I've been to all the seminars. I've talked to Monty Roberts. I've listened to Buck Brannaman. I know horses. I feel for them. They're willing, dumb animals. I'm not consciously going to let some guy do something to them because he can."

Ned Bonnie retired as Jt. MFH of Long Run Hounds after 25 years in the position. His mount Northcote Road (pictured) is a Thoroughbred who won multiple stakes races and more than $750,000 at the track. "He was given to me by his owners after he finished his racing career," said Bonnie. "He has hunted in Kentucky, Virginia, Georgia and Tennessee. He is quiet and an old friend."