The Making of Secretariat:

A Comparative Study of Three Approaches to the Story of America’s Greatest Racing Horse: William Nack’s Secretariat: The Making of a Champion (1975), the Walt Disney Film Secretariat (2010), and John Tweedy’s Documentary Penny and Red (2013)

B.A. Essay

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May 2018
Abstract

The story of Secretariat is on its own an extraordinary one as it revolves around the greatest American thoroughbred horse that won the Triple Crown in 1973 and its owner Penny Chenery Tweedy, who was in her own right a pioneer among women in the equestrian world. What makes it even more remarkable is the gradual emergence of this story through three different sources. William Nack's book *Secretariat: the Making of a Champion* (1975) takes us through the actual detailed events of Secretariat's progress prior to and during his racing years, exploring his blood-line and the key players in the breeding business, but coincidently casting a shadow on Penny’s role in the process. On the other hand, the film director Randall Wallace amplifies Penny's character, adding a note of unrealistic perfection. This is not surprising as such, since the film is a Disney production and Disney has a specific formula for its heroines whereby they must be just, innocent and pleasant – something Penny not always was in reality. The plot revolves mostly around Penny and omissions of facts are made in order to create a more pleasing story for a wider audience. The contrast between the two sources gives a better idea of the actual unfolding of events during Secretariat's reign, but what brings the story full circle is the documentary made by John Tweedy, *Penny & Red* (2013), which provides us with the missing links from the previous two sources, and finally allows us to see the full picture, warts and all. Just as Penny Chenery breaks boundaries for women in the equestrian world, inspiring them to take part as owners, trainers and jockeys, Secretariat inspires a whole nation by breaking all three Triple Crown records – records that still stand, indispensible proof of his extraordinary strength and endurance.
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1. Introduction

As in most Disney movies and animated feature films such as Snow White (1937), Cinderella (1950), Pollyanna (1960) and numerous others we see yet again a female character portrayed as a heroine – this time Helen Bates "Penny" Chenery Tweedy in Secretariat (2010). Penny, the owner of Secretariat, a horse that is a legend in his own right, was presented by Disney as a protagonist that gave a voice to women in the equestrian world as well as a voice to Secretariat himself. The book Secretariat: the Making of a Champion (1975), by William Nack, takes the reader into a detailed world of horse racing and Secretariat's career. It does not, however, shed much light on the woman who stood behind Secretariat all that time. Considering that in the 1970s there was no place for a woman to meddle in horse racing, this made Penny Chenery that more important and necessary as a figure among thoroughbred owners and a true pioneer for women in the equestrian world. This essay will examine the different depictions of Penny and Secretariat's success starting with Nack's book that is based on pure facts, showing pretty much a documentation of Secretariat's life and the people involved in it. Then I will move on to compare the book with the Disney film version Secretariat, directed by Randall Wallace. Although suggested by Nack's book, the film prioritizes Penny over Secretariat and many of the book’s facts are omitted, making the result of this adaptation more acceptable and appropriate for a wider audience. The final version, with which I conclude the analysis, is the documentary Penny and Red (2013) created by Penny's son John Tweedy. Here we will mostly see how, by combining the facts from Nack's book with the subtle storytelling by Wallace in the film version, he pieces together the whole story. In the documentary some parts that were unclear in the two former adaptations, along with facts that were never presented, come to light in interviews with Penny, and in interviews Tweedy and Nack gave regarding the documentary. Nack collaborated on the project with Tweedy and made the story that much more revealing, by adding all the parts that he partially mentioned in his book, but never to a full extent, either because he was not aware of them, or he simply did not want to include then in his book. The journey of Penny and Secretariat, as the woman broke boundaries in a predominantly male sport, and Secretariat as a colt that broke all records, could not be told in full if all three sources were not pieced together.
2. Women in equestrianism

2.1. Equestrian sports are a "boys club"

Women have been battling for their rights and equality in equestrian sports for as long as one can remember – starting with the right to not have to use a side saddle, which ironically is much more uncomfortable and less stable than a regular saddle. Side saddles were made particularly for women, so that they would be able to maintain their ladylike posture, while paradoxically putting them in more danger instead of protecting them and giving the rider a better grasp and stability on a moving horse. We have now reached the time when women cannot only ride horses like men, but they may also be judged under equal standards as men. It has been a long time coming, and the fact of the matter is as Diane Crump told TIME in 1969, "A horse doesn't know whether the rider on his back wears a dress or pants away from the track" (Rothman). Equestrian sports have been for very long the only Olympic sport where men and women compete and are judged equally. The opportunity to ride a good horse or to be offered a sponsorship, which is how most athletes draw their earnings, is very slim when it comes to women in riding. When choosing a national team or jockeys for first-class races, such as the Triple Crown races, it is mostly men who do the selecting. Equestrian sports have been a predominantly male club for a long time and so the "majority of selection committees, stewards, course designers and even top federation officials are male" (Eder). It has always been thought that men are simply physically more adequate for a strenuous sport such as this and have a more stable psyche to handle a half-ton animal, but what remains the primal problem is that there is no room for maternity leaves in horse racing, as there isn’t in any other equine disciplines. "Everyone knows you’re only as good as your last win, so why would you have a child and risk losing your spot. ... Most top level female equestrian athletes just don’t have children. I can’t and won’t quote you statistics, but of the three female Olympic riders I rode for, the entire child count = a big fat 0," states Sarah Eder (Eder).
2.2. The importance of weight regarding gender norms

The fight for level ground racing has been best portrayed through Diane Crump's career, who has opened the door for women to take part in a first-class race such as the Kentucky Derby, only to realize years later that merely six women have gone through that door alongside more than 300 men – women are outnumbered 50 to 1 in top races (von Hippel). The constantly repeated argument is that women simply have a more adequate size for horse racing. One of the most important predispositions in the jockey world is to have a smaller build and remain light throughout a career, having a weight which varies from 107 to 126 pounds, depending on the race. Of course one must subtract the weight of the saddle which is 7 pounds, so in practical terms the jockey needs to weigh as little as 100 pounds. "Men often struggle to maintain racing weights. Nearly a quarter of male jockeys are underweight for their height, and large percentages of jockeys skip meals (69%), take laxatives (14%), and dehydrate themselves with diuretics (34%), saunas (67%), spitting and sweatsuits. Bulimia is so common, affecting 30% of jockeys, that many race tracks have installed 'heaving bowls'" (von Hippel). Since it is much easier to find a woman jockey that would suit the weight limits, one would think owners and trainers would rush for the opportunity to employ one, but no such turn of events has happened. The France Galop's recent initiative to give female jockeys a weight allowance in certain races of 2 kg has been a very controversial move in the equine discipline (Cook). Just as fillies are allowed to carry less weight then colts are, since they are estimated to be weaker compared to their male competitors, so has the decision been made that this privilege should be offered to women riders as well. Horses have always been packed with weights in their saddles to level the competition, meaning if a horse is carrying a lighter rider he will have weights added inside his saddle; or, if he is carrying a less experienced rider he will be allowed to carry less weight – by doing so the sport is encouraging owners and trainer to use new riders instead of experienced older riders, which they would naturally prefer. This also allows new jockeys to gain experience faster and have more opportunities of riding better horses and high class races. The weight factor is important for the race since it is believed that every pound equals one horse length, which is a substantial distance in any horse race where a tenth of a second could establish a winner. However, when it comes to weight
allowances for women, not all have accepted this as a favourable change – not even women.

Under the new French system, applying to 90% of races, horses ridden by women have 2kg deducted from the weight they would otherwise have carried, with the intention of encouraging owners and trainers to make more use of female jockeys. But some in Britain, including last year’s champion apprentice, Josephine Gordon, are offended and in some cases outraged at the suggestion that women cannot be as effective as men in the saddle. (Cook)

On the one hand it does give women a boost that they were in need of for quite some time, but on the other hand it diminishes the value of the battle women have wanted to win for so long in this sport: equality. Allowing women to have less weight then men in a race puts them automatically in a leading position, while it also shows that the rules for women need to be bent in order for them to win. This is not so, since female jockeys have proven thus far that they are just as capable as male jockeys, physically and mentally. Yet, the fact remains that without a push like this one by the French, women would still remain in the shadows of their male counterparts and would not be given the opportunities to ride good races or good horses. The belief that a woman is incapable of riding a horse as well as a man was shared by many before and is shared by many today still. A true representative of the sport, jockey Bill Hartack, who won the Kentucky Derby five times, stated in Life magazine, "I won't stop (women) from trying (to race), hey, maybe a couple of them will make it. The rest (will) find out how hard it is and they'll give up…because a female cannot compete against a male doing anything" (von Hippel). Even though men are physically stronger and have a larger percentage of muscle than women, that does not affect a sport like horse racing, because technique and the feel of the horse is what wins races. Altering the rules of horse racing is a very sensitive subject since it automatically brings the sports back to its basic gender problem, and women have endured enough scrutiny already throughout the years. The decision made by the French is being observed closely by the British and the American race committees, but so far neither of them have decided to follow in their footsteps even though "female jockeys had been given 25% more rides than last year and had been placed 130% more often" by French statistics (Cook).
2.3. Women’s ongoing battle in horse racing

The physical and mental abuse that women had to take in equine sports is best depicted through Diane Crump's experiences which are well known throughout the jockey world. She was a true pioneer for women in the sport and created a very important stepping stone by racing in the Kentucky Derby.

Diane would reminisce about those days: "The crowd was just swarming all over me. They were crazy, up in arms... The hecklers were yelling: 'Go back to the kitchen and cook dinner.' That was the mentality at the time. They thought I was going to be the downfall of the whole sport, which is such a medieval thought. I was like: 'Come on people, this is the 1960s!'" (McKenzie)

It is not only the irrational fear men have that women riders would be dangerous to other riders and horses, because they would not know how to react and control the horse under pressure, but also the money that is involved in these races, it appeared to the men, would be at risk. Crump recalls that "people were saying we weren't strong enough or smart enough to ride in a pari-mutuel (professional gambling) race" (McKenzie). Among her many stories one stood the test of time – an incident during a race in 1970 which happened between Crump and a Puerto Rican jockey:

While leading the pack, Crump realized the jockey just behind was holding on to her saddle, giving his horse a free ride. In the days before CCTV cameras, Crump did what any jockey would do and get away with – she got out her stick and whacked him. The pair spent the remainder of the race hitting each other until finally he pulled away in the last leg and won. "When he came off the track, the women in the crowd blasted him with tomatoes, eggs, anything they could find," Crump said. "They were booing their own country's jockey, threatening bodily harm to him after the race, while I was greeted by cheering, enthusiastic women." (McKenzie)

It has been a long road for women, to reach this equality, starting with Anna Lee Aldred who was only 18 when, in 1939, she became the first American woman to be a licensed, professional jockey. She set a standard for other women: instead of wanting just to race, she wanted the respectability and money that came with pro racing (Rothman). In January 1969
there came Kathy Kusner, a member of the U.S. Olympic Equestrian team, who "won the legal right for women to ride in pari-mutuel races by suing the Maryland Racing Commission, but was injured and didn’t make the first ride" (Zieralski). But the real star appeared on February 7, 1969 in the form of Diane Crump, only 19 at the time who became "the first female jockey to compete in a professional thoroughbred race in the U.S., needing a police escort at Hialeah Race Track to do so" (Zieralski). A few days later, on February 22, 1969, Barbara Rubin becomes the first woman to win a race, winning on Cohesion at Charles Town. It was planned for her to ride in June at Tropical Park in Florida, "but male riders threatened to boycott the race" and so she did not (Zieralski). It was only a year later in 1970 that a woman was allowed to participate in a first class race and that was when Diane Crump's fame had risen above any other female jockey's. She became the first woman to ride in the Kentucky Derby and until June 1993 no women won any of the Triple Crown races, except finally when Julie Krone took "the Belmont Stakes aboard Colonial Affair"(Zieralski).The reason women do not often become winners is because only a handful of them are entered into first-class races. Now, in 2018, we see how far women have come, yet as Sarah Eder states, "regardless of your gender, I’m sure you can agree that while we do get to compete on an equal level, our equestrian sport is far, far from truly 'equal'"(Eder).

2.4. Women as owners

This brings us to the most important aspect of horse racing: ownership. It has always been a sport for the rich and owners have in most cases been predominantly white, rich men. However, this has succumbed to change as well. Earlier on, even if a woman would inherit a breeding farm of thoroughbreds from her father, her husband would be the one to take over, and mostly sons would inherit the business. Today women are becoming racehorse owners; Sheila Rosenblum is an example of such a woman. "She is the owner of Lady Sheila Stable and the head of the all women's racing syndicate… but now, Rosenblum, and women like her, are changing the industry. All of the investors in both of the syndicates Rosenblum oversees are women" (Herships). As owners, not only are they able to make decisions when it comes to selective breeding of thoroughbred horses, but also of the trainers and jockeys that would be working in the business. By introducing more female
jockeys, trainers, warm-up riders and stable staff they are doing something far greater – they are introducing women to the sport. We will not see women come to the race course anymore because of their husbands or to show off their exquisite hats, but they will come as fans of the sport, and place bets and cheer because seeing their own gender in the sport is the most effective motivation. This as a whole contributes to the sport itself, as it will be more popular, more participated in, and bring in more money to the betting at the end of the day. Rosenbun expresses how exhilarating and challenging it is being an owner and making decisions in a mostly-male industry, but even though it is "tough as heck" she loves it (Herships). This all brings us to the woman who set an example to all others that took a chance in this important role of ownership – Penny Chenery, the owner of Secretariat.

2.5. Penny Chenery as a beacon for women in horseracing

As Elisabeth Taylor captured the imagination of little girls on the big screen in National Velvet (1944), so did Penny Chenery in real life. She became the first woman to breed and own a Triple Crown winner (Youngling). With all the interviews and magazine covers she graced, one could say she might have been one of the first women to be noticed in the equestrian world.

Penny challenged gender norms by achieving great success in the male-dominated industry of horse racing. She became the first female to breed a Triple Crown winner and was given the nickname, 'The First Lady of Racing'. In 1983, Penny became one of the first women to be admitted as a member of the Jockey Club, the breed registry for Thoroughbred horses in the United States. As a result, in 2006, Penny also became the first woman to receive the Eclipse Award of Merit, the highest honour in the Thoroughbred racing industry. (Youngling)

Her father, Christopher, was an avid rider and passionate horse breeder, and Penny was always a daddy's girl – what he did, she did. She had an independent mind from a very early age, so it was quite natural that she wanted to expand her horizons as a young woman and left the Meadow to join the Red Cross in 1945. While working with soldiers in France during WWII, Penny for the first time got a taste of what it was like living in a man's world. Her feminist streak was revealed very early in her life and she firmly set boundaries for all the men she was surrounded by and turned them into friends–"I knew how to please, I knew
how to set limits, I knew how to get guys to do things for me – I was playing a role and would keep plying it because it worked” (Penny & Red 13:48). This proved to be a very useful talent latter on in life once she became the owner of the Meadow and needed to run a business dominated by men. Her daughter Sarah stated with pride in an interview "She approached the business like any man would" (Penny & Red 22:45).

Facts were given to us in the book, which were later confirmed in interviews she had in the documentary Penny and Red, while in the film we see a romanticized version of this fierce woman. She had a sharp business mind, and that had a price: the abandonment of her family. Penny did not try to excuse her decision for prioritizing her life as an owner of Secretariat over her husband and children. "I married after the war, moved to Colorado, raised my four children and that was not enough… I was dying for something to do" (Durkin 13:10).

3. The book Secretariat: the Making of a Champion

William Nack passed away recently on April 13, 2018, but left a very important piece of literary work behind that is not only a testament to the greatest American racehorse in history, but also a record of the racing world back in 1973. Secretariat: the Making of a Champion is a book filled with facts, but written by someone who obviously understood and had spent a lot of time around the race track. This brings me to another important contribution Nack left to the equine world – his investigation into the cortisone abuse, a scandal he exposed in 1993. "One veterinarian spoke to him off the record: cortisone had become the stables’ drug of choice to mask the fatigue of injured horses unfit for racing" (Saratoga).

Women jockeys and owners may have come far since then, but there is one thing that remains unchanged till this very day – Secretariat's Triple Crown records. Secretariat is not only a Triple Crown winner, which is a rarity in itself, considering that there have been only twelve horses in history that have achieved this, but he also actually still holds the record for each of the races: the Kentucky Derby (1:59 2/5), the Preakness Stakes (1:53), and the Belmont Stakes (2:24). The Belmont stands out as the most memorable of all since
it is the longest of the three races and Secretariat won by 31 lengths, something no horse since has ever come close to achieving.

While in high school, Nack worked as a groom for trainer Bill Molter. It was during his College years at the University of Illinois that he started writing. Yet as soon as he graduated in 1966 he joined the Army and took a tour in Vietnam, after which he moved to Long Island to work as a political and environmental writer for *Newsday*. It was only in 1971 when he jumped on top of a newsroom desk at a Christmas party and "recited, chronologically, the names of every Kentucky Derby winner, from the inaugural race in 1875" that he became a turf writer (Saratoga). Nack's book is a detailed journey of Secretariat's life, documenting his unprecedented year as a three-year-old colt in 1973 in the second half, while the first half he gives us a thorough history of the horses around him and the people involved in the breeding business. *Secretariat: the Making of a Champion* is much more factual and detailed than the film *Secretariat* (2010) that it inspired. One should also keep in mind that Nack wrote this semi-biography in 1975, only two years after Secretariat's Triple Crown win. He methodically introduces us to all the blood lines which had to come together to produce this remarkable colt. While Nack skilfully describes each mare and sire going down Secretariat's blood line, he also writes very detailed biographies of the owners of these horses. Mostly the upper-class elite is represented and their lifestyle, which includes horse racing. It was not a sport for any other class, nor did this status change over the years. This remarkable, tightly-knit community’s ancestors have not only prevailed through all the hardships of American history, from the Civil War (1861), to the Great Depression (1929), but have accumulated wealth as well. Their offspring remain in the thoroughbred breeding business and through them we are introduced to the horses that form Secretariat's family tree.

One of these men who built something from the ashes of the Civil War was Penny's grandfather, and this inspired his son Chris Chenery to become a millionaire. Once he was able to establish himself as a financial equal to all the other wealthy American families, Chris went into the business of breeding thoroughbreds, wisely investing in mares. The importance of stallions was unquestionable, but mares, just like women, seemed to have been overlooked, which is quite noticeably done by Nack in his book as well. A representative of his time, Nack focuses on the qualities of stallions, and so when going
through Secretariat’s blood line he meticulously describes the qualities each stallion passed on to Secretariat while also going to great lengths to emphasize the dominance and importance of his sire Bold Ruler. "Some stallions excite themselves into readiness by sniffing at a mare, but Bold Ruler was not one of them. All he needed to do was look" (Nack 53). This constant over-praising of stallions threw an even bigger shadow and diminished the value of mares even more, which was ironic since we come to the conclusion later in the documentary *Penny & Red* that mares were just as important as stallions. "In the end Chris Chanery and Penny's intuition turned out to be true – that mares and stallions are equal" (*Penny & Red* 56:40). In Secretariat's case Somethingroyal, his dam, was more important for several reasons. Firstly, she was the leader of the herd which was very important for his mentality (Durkin 4:13), and secondly not only did he inherit an extraordinary heart "passed down the female line on the X chromosome from the legendary Eclipse, foaled in England in 1764" (Haun), through his dam's line, but he also passed it on to a daughter who turned out to be much more successful than his sons. "In 1992, Secretariat was the leading brood-mare sire in the nation, his 135 daughters having produced the winners of more purse money, almost $6.7 million, than the daughters sired by any other stallion (Nack 454). Nack mentioned Secretariat's heart in an exclusive chapter in his book *Pure Heart*, which was not mentioned in the movie, yet Secretariat is so famous for this that most people tribute his extraordinary career to it. Dr. Thomas Swerczek who performed the necropsy stated "We were all shocked... I've done thousands of autopsies on horses, and nothing I've ever seen compared to this... And it wasn't pathologically enlarged. All the chambers and the valves were normal. It was just large. I think it told us why he was able to do what he did" (Nack 429). An average horse's heart weighs 8.5 pounds, while Secretariat's heart was approximately 22 pounds. By sheer coincidence, the second largest heart of a race horse belonged to Sham, Secretariat's biggest competitor in 1973, whose heart weighed 18 pounds (Haun).

Sham was the only other horse in the Disney movie that we heard about, but what I found in Nack's book was that that even though Sham had an important role that year and was a great competitor (also breaking two track records, at the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness alongside Secretariat), he was not the most important horse in the story. This was something that Penny confirmed time and time again: the reason the Meadow was saved
was not because of Secretariat but because of Riva Ridge. This was a colt only a year younger than Secretariat, who was strange looking (Nack 69) and a very timid runner on the track (Nack 139), but despite that he won two out of the three Triple Crown races in 1972. Penny always had a closer relationship with Riva because he saved the Meadow and because he was constantly overshadowed by Secretariat. This we did not see in Wallace's movie, instead we were shown the exact opposite where Penny appears to have a strong bond with Secretariat from the day he was foaled, while Riva was never even mentioned. "In the beginning Penny resented Secretariat – resented his outrageous good looks and his physique, his first victory by six, and his promise as a two-year-old, fearing for the eminence of Riva, her golden boy" (Nack 129).

Riva Ridge might have been Penny's golden boy, but Secretariat was most definitely Lucien Laurin's. He was the one who trained Secretariat from the start, was involved in Secretariat's rise and to an extent responsible for his unforgettable performances. Trainers can make or break a horse, but Lucien knew how to train this "super-horse" as everyone started calling him in 1973.

Lucien was not a hands-on trainer... He wouldn't spend a lot of time at the barn. But when he was there, he was a great observer. He picked up on things very quickly. He was a better trainer than his son. I don’t want to be critical of Roger, but he didn’t have the intuition that his father had. He trained every horse alike. Lucien had a different regimen for every horse. That’s why he worked Secretariat so hard, because he knew he needed it. (Christine)

What we do not see in the movie is that Penny was introduced to Lucien through his son Roger, who was Penny's trainer at first, but he got an offer from the Phipps family and suggested to Penny to try his father Lucien as a trainer for Riva Ridge – the horse that brought him out of retirement (Nack 124). But what we do see in the movie is Penny firing her father's trainer and by doing so asserting a dominant position regarding the business, almost as a man would (HT2FF 13:20). Interestingly, Nack decided to leave that part out, and only mentions Chris's trainer of twenty-five years twice – when he resigns with no further explanation (Nack 122) and when he came to Chris's funeral (Nack 168). Lucien realized soon enough, although rarely wanting to admit it to himself or others, that he was
training the best horse he had ever had. Not really getting over his loss with Riva Ridge the previous year at the Preakness and missing out on the Triple Crown, Lucien trod carefully and kept only the best around him, on a need-to-know basis.

Nack focuses on other men besides Lucien, who were with Secretariat and literally came along for the ride, like Ron Turcotte his jockey. Turcotte is the only remaining survivor from the Secretariat team and still talks about horse racing with great enthusiasm, even though an accident during a race in 1978, on Flag of Leyte Gulf, left him in a wheelchair (Nack 426). In Nack's book and when watching films of the races, one can see how Turcotte almost never uses the whip with Secretariat which is very rare for a jockey, especially when nearing the finish line and the horses start to tire. Secretariat just had to be hand ridden, because he would go every quarter mile faster than the previous one, which no other horse did. Turcotte recalls his famous Belmont win: "I finally had to turn to see where the other horses were. I know this sounds crazy, but the horse did it by himself. I was along for the ride" (Flatter). Many conversations were recorded in Nack's book and so were the rituals before and after horse racing, which Eddie Sweat, Secretariat's groom, explained to Nack. Even though he might have not had a big part in the Disney film, Sweat had a big part in Secretariat's life and remained the only man whose voice the horse would recognize (Nack 417). He was Lucien's most trusted groom and was the only one besides Lucien who knew about the abscess, which till this very day remains a mystery. Nack heard about the abscess from Dr. Manuel Gilman and had a theory that Lucien denied it till the day he passed because "he grew up in the leaky roof circuit of horse racing, and such information was valuable, and you didn’t share with anybody, not even the owner" (HT2FF 7:30)

Seth Hancock plays another major role in Secretariat’s life, as he was the one who singlehandedly syndicated him. Secretariat was worth $6.08 million in 1972, which made each of his shares amount to $190.000 – the highest price of a share for a horse up until then. Even though Seth was portrayed as half-capable in the Disney movie, Nack gave us the real picture in his book where Seth fearlessly attacked the market, selling the first share to no other then Ogden Phipps (Nack 190). On top of which, Phipps was villainized by Disney, appearing to be suspicious of Secretariat's performance and constantly hovering over Penny, when in reality, as Nack wrote, he was a great supporter of Secretariat from day one. The sale turned out to be quite unrealistically adapted in the film, where we see
Penny take control of the situation when realizing the shares could not be sold and pushing Seth aside as she goes on to confront Phipps, and with her confidence, strength and cliché speech talks him into buying a share (Secretariat). There was simply no need to diminish Seth's role in the syndicate of Secretariat's shares, or to give the audience a sense that Secretariat's shares were risky, and by so doing questioning the value of this great horse, only to build up Penny as a strong female character, which she already was in real life.

4. The film Secretariat

Many reviews of the movie point out that perhaps too much emphasis was put on Penny and not enough on Secretariat, but arguably the movie only scratched the surface of this woman’s turbulent life and her lifelong battle for women in the sport. Producer Mark Ciardi stated from the very beginning "really, it's Penny's story" (Szkotak). Disney always had a formula for films, making them appealing to a broader audience, softening the edges, adding motivational factors, and turning it into a child-friendly story while always focusing on a hero and very often a female one, so naturally an exception was not made when it came to Randall Wallace's film Secretariat (2010). Wallace was known for writing the screenplay for Braveheart (1995) and Pearl Harbor (2001) and as critic Andrew O'Hehir said "one of mainstream Hollywood's few prominent Christians, and has spoken openly about his faith and his desire to make movies that appeal to people with middle-American values" (O'Hehir). We see religion dominate the movie, as it opens with "a voice-over passage from the Book of Job" and ends with the gospel song O Happy Day (O'Hehir) implying that God was responsible for Secretariat's success, which we do not see a glimpse of in Nack's book, though on the other hand Wallace wisely stated in the credits that the movie was not "based on", but only "suggested by" Nack's book, leaving him room to insert as much of a personal statement as he wished. Roger Ebert strongly criticized O'Hehir, arguing that Wallace surely had the right to speak about his faith (Ebert), which to an extent is true, unless as in this case, personal factors start to overshadow the true storyline. O'Hehir's review showed no mercy for Penny either, as he went on with a cynical undertone to say:
This long-suffering female Job overcomes such tremendous obstacles as having been born white and Southern and possessed of impressive wealth and property, and who then lucks into owning a genetic freak who turned out to be faster and stronger than any racehorse ever foaled. And guess what? She triumphs anyway! ...She busts down the doors on the boys' club of old-money Kentucky and Virginia racing, outwits the tax authorities and defangs Pancho Martin, in between doing loads of her kids' laundry. (O'Hehir)

While O'Hehir might think Penny was portrayed as an unrealistic super woman who could multitask and juggle all, her daughter Kate admits that Diane Lane might have played Penny as a softer character then she really was (Smith 6:20). Considering that Penny needed to be a Disney princess in this picture in order to appeal to the audience more, I believe there was truth in both statements. Penny might have been born into a wealthy, white family and with some luck got an outstanding colt, but she was also a woman who fought her way through a sport dominated by men and came out as a winner. The Disney film did not portray all her strengths because it would have been too harsh for its projected audience, but it did shed a lot of light on her, and rightly so. In no way was Penny a present mother, nor did she break down doors, outsmart tax authorities or have public duels with Sham's trainer Pancho Martin. It was no secret that she put her business before her family and they knew it too. While she might have been portrayed as a mother who would cry when she missed out on her daughter’s play, in reality she was a mother who made no excuse when she missed out on anything, not even Parents Day at her son's school: "there will be other Parents Days but there won't be other Gold Cups" she went on to say (Nack 160). Her relationship with Martin was always courteous and the press loved her because she was the sport's most engaging, visible and energetic spokeswomen" (Nack 370). Martin did make provocative press statements, but in no way was he a chauvinistic villain who labelled Penny a housewife out of her place (Secretariat) – his aspersions were aimed at Lucien and Lucien alone – "All you hear from Laurin is excuses, excuses, excuses, excuses. He’s got more excuses than China’s got rice, and China’s got a lot of rice. Cryin’ like a little baby. That’s not my game" (Nack 301).

Roger Eber may have tried to criticize O'Hehir for suggesting that Penny was lucky in getting Secretariat, but the fact of the matter was that she did. The only wise move Penny
made, even though in the film we get a completely different picture, was that she did not sell the business like her brother and sister desperately wanted; instead she went through with the deal her father had made a few years back with Ogden Phipps. The coin toss was not successful because Penny had intricate knowledge of the thoroughbred bloodlines, but because through chance she simply lost the bet. Ironically, Phipps was disappointed he won the bet because it meant he would receive only one foal instead of two, which we do not see in the film, but we must keep in mind that Wallace was shooting a crowd-pleaser and there needed to be a clear high-point, especially one that exalts Penny in a male dominated sport. Nack, on the other hand explains the coin toss in his book clearly, where we learn that at the time of the toss in 1969 one of the mares had come up barren. The deal Phipps had with Chris Chenery was to breed two mares with his stallion for two consecutive years, then flip a coin once the mares have conceived the second time to see who gets first pick. Unfortunately, the person who gets first pick for the two foals in 1969, would get second pick for the two foals in 1970, and since there was only one foal in 1970, the winner would be left only with his first pick from 1969. Neither Phipps nor Penny knew Somethingroyal's colt would turn out to be Secretariat, all they knew was that the winner of the toss would end up with one foal, while the loser would end up with two (Nack 52).

"The movie barely mentions Angle Light in the race call of the Wood… I realized going in that this was Hollywood, and to keep a movie going, you have to disturb the facts and enhance things here and there. So the things in the film that didn’t really happen don’t bother me at all… I think it's a wonderful picture" was Penny's take on Wallace's film (Christine). Naturally a film adaptation cannot tell the story the same way as the book and in some cases it tries to simplify the plot in order to keep the audience's attention. That was why Riva Ridge's victories were left out, as Disney's people said there simply could not be two high-points in a movie (Smith 2:40). This was the case too with Angle Light at the Wood Memorial. Since it is already established in the film that Sham is Secretariat's rival, just like Martin was to be Penny's, there was no room for another horse. As the race ends we see Martin walking into the stable with Sham shouting and bragging "Magnificent! Next time we'll bury him even worse" (Secretariat). Martin's priority was having his horse win, not coming in second, but Wallace skilfully shot this scene. Since the atmosphere was turned into a frenzy over Sham it would appear that he won, but if one looks closely, Angle
Light's victory was not omitted—you can see him cross the finish line a bit before Sham, but only noticeable to someone who knew the outcome of the race.

What the audience was also not shown was Penny's famous temper. It had to be toned down by Diane Lane, because this was a woman who stood shoulder to shoulder with powerful men and there would have been no possibility of her making it if she was as gentle as Lane portrayed her. It was Angle Light's owner Edwin Whittaker who was the target of her fury after the Wood Memorial – she insulted him in front of everyone in a restaurant and told him to pick up his marbles and go home (Nack 311). In her opinion Whittaker had to be removed because Penny was not sure where Lucien's loyalty lay, since he was Angle Light's trainer too, and this was the horse that just beat hers. This, however, was also left out by Wallace, since it could have raised suspicion in the audience and disrupted the flow of the story, which was not desirable in a Disney movie.

The Triple Crown races Secretariat ran were shot by Wallace with impeccable faithfulness to the source. When it came to the Preakness race, Jack and the children did not accompany Penny, instead they watched it at home as shown in the film (Smith 2:39), so it was decided that real footage needed to be played on the TV screen. This brought about a big change in Secretariat's legacy. The 1973 Preakness race time was corrected after 39 years. The footage Wallace needed for the shot was examined with better technology than ever before, and since new regulations were pronounced for race timing in 1999, Penny could finally make her case (Abrams 5:17). It was not possible to mention this in the book or film since this huge injustice was corrected in 2012, but the film did become an important stepping stone for this procedure. Secretariat ran the Preakness in 1:53:25 and, just like his owner, he had to wait a long time to be recognized. Penny got her voice after the Disney movie, which many criticized for revolving more around her than the horse, which in turn gave her the motivation, courage and freedom to make a documentary with her son three years later, finally opening up to the world and telling it like it is from a woman's point of view. Secretariat on the other hand had to wait 39 years to finally have his 1975 Preakness record awarded. This was not only important for Secretariat's legacy, making him the legend he is today, breaking all three Triple Crown records in 1973 and holding them still, but it was an important corrected injustice for the racing world. The
racing game is built on the integrity of the timed records, people bet a lot of money in this sport and the timing need to be accurate.

'It is wonderful for the sport to remove an asterisk and wonderful for the legacy of Secretariat and his fans, who believed he set the record in all three Triple Crown races,' said Leonard Lusky, who represented Chenery at the hearing. (Patton)

Considering all the changes in the Disney movie adaptation, I believe that Wallace mellowed the story enough to reach a broader audience and different age groups, while still keeping it intact and staying with the true sequence of events. Even though it is only suggested by Nack's book, it does seem to derive quite a lot of detail that could only be noticed by readers – such as the Preakness Stakes. It introduced a piece of history to a newer generation that might not have known about Secretariat or horse racing altogether and gave joy to an older audience by reliving memorable moments such as during the Belmont Stakes when Chick Anderson went on to shout the legendary phrase "he is moving like a tremendous machine!" (Nack399). And that is what his heart was – a huge machine, combined with his thick cannon bones that enabled him to run hard and dig his hoofs into the ground allowing him to achieve what no horse has achieved before or since.

However, one important fact that linked the book and the film was not mentioned in either: William Nack, who was played by Kevin Connolly in Secretariat. If it were not for this man and his valuable and precise documentation there would not have been a book nor the movie we see today. It almost never came to be, as an event happened that was kept secret from the public until a press conference held for John Tweedy's documentary. Nack was promoting the documentary too when he revealed to the press conference how shocked he was when Penny banned him from the barn after the Belmont and had forbidden Lucien, Turcotte and Sweat to speak to him, once he had told her he wanted to write a book. It became a very uncomfortable conference because in reply to Nack's statement "I thought they were friends, what an illusion", John, the director of the documentary that they were both promoting that day, replied: "they thought you were a friend too" (HT2FF 17:50). This was not an unusual move for a turf writer, to gather his many notes and compile them into a book. Especially in a case such as Nack's, who followed the colt around for a year, recording his every step and the actions of the people involved in his success, which were
Penny his owner, Lucien his trainer, Turcotte his jockey and Sweat his groom. Nack's commitment turned more into a lifestyle, then a job, for his dedication was unfailing and a reader can see this because barely any situation in Secretariat's life went by without Nack being present. This included the abscess problem, which he discovered in spite of it being a well-kept secret. After so much commitment to cut off a writer straight after the horse's biggest victory was a big move, but one Penny was obviously not going to make excuses for. Eventually, Nack's publisher made a deal with Penny and the relationship between her and Nack was mended, but what Nack realized was that she was not angry with him, she was just generally angry with her life even though she had all this success(HT2FF 18:12). This seemed to be the only reason we are provided with, but once the documentary her son John Tweedy released in 2013, it did not seem like a big stretch from the truth.

5. The documentary Penny & Red

"After the release of the Disney version of our family’s life, we, and my mother in particular, felt like there was more of a story to tell" – John Tweedy. (Meltz)

The year 1973 was not only the year of Secretariat, it was a year when the Vietnam War was ending, when the Watergate Scandal was culminating and the Battle of the Sexes match was taking place. These were all very important events, but none of them seem to affect the mood of Nack's book or Wallace's film and neither did Penny's true feelings. While Nack seemed to tiptoe around her life, sticking to the racing track, Wallace tried to soften the edges by making the story more compliable to a Disney production. Then, in 2013, her son John Tweedy decided to reveal in a documentary all the details that were left out of the two former versions. He thought he would be the right person for the job, not only because he was Penny's son, but because he was a lawyer and "lawyering in litigation and lawsuits is a form of storytelling, and documentary filmmaking is a sense of storytelling. … It’s a search for truth" (Meltz). Penny & Red: the Life of Secretariat's Owner (2013) revealed a lot about Penny and her family, mostly the troubled side of her relationships with the men in her life. From an early age she harboured an anger that only grew greater in time, but once she took control of the Meadow, she took control of her life.
The scene in *Secretariat* during the Belmont race, where everyone was standing in disbelief at what a pace this horse was moving away from the others, Penny seemed to let go of any constraints set by society and shouts out "let him run, Ronny, let him run!" (*Secretariat*), almost as if she was the one running – and she was. She ran from a life she did not want and she broke away from social norms and proved to all that she was far ahead of her time, just like Secretariat was far ahead in his race – they both broke away from the herd. So once the time came to release the documentary Penny simply stated: "I don't know how it's going to work out. …It may spoil my image. I don't know and at this point, I don't care. Actually it was very freeing to go ahead and do the interview" (Patton).

The first and most important man in Penny's life was her father, Chris Chenery, who loved his daughter, but had certain expectations of her, which complied with social norms of that time. Penny was aware she was not the son her father wanted and that she would always be limited and steered into a life of a housewife (*Penny & Red* 8:46). Once she returned from the Red Cross her father actually made her a proposal she did not expect as a daughter, which was to go to college and while studying he would give her an allowance that would amount to the highest salary she could get. So Penny went to Columbia School of Business and was one of only twenty women out of eight hundred men in the college that year –and she excelled in her studies (Nack 118). She also gained the knowledge that would come in quite handy later on when she took over the Meadow, because at Columbia she was in a man's world and had to learn to function as a minority. Unfortunately, it did not last, because as soon as Penny met Jack Tweedy and he asked her hand in marriage, her father told her to leave school and concentrate on her future husband. "That was quite a bit of growing up for me" (*Penny & Red* 15:16), she would recall in the documentary, as she realized her father's whole concept of putting her through school was to find a successful husband and not really work within her profession. Just shy of one exam to graduate, Penny had to pack up and move to Colorado with Jack where she quickly learned the role she had to play. Chris had given her wings only to clip them before she flew. Symbolic of Chris's relationship with his mares was his relationship with Penny, for as Nack mentions, just as his trophy room was furnished by his mares, so was his business carried on by his daughter, providing him with all the trophies he could not claim during his years in the business (Nack 168). He was aware of the greatness of mares and was one of the rare people who
suspected their importance in his breeding business, which was why he largely invested in them and not stallions. But he also suspected the greatness that lay in his daughter but never allowed it to thrive.

Before her frustration in her married life began, Penny had much accrued anger bottled inside her due to the abuse she received from her brother Hollis. He was the only boy in the family and so had more rights than Penny in the household, rights that he would exercise vigorously. Penny talked in an interview of an incident when she sat in a chair Hollis wanted to sit in, how he picked her up by the hair and dragged her out."My brother was physically abusive. So I grew up angry," explained Penny (Penny & Red 8:42). Interestingly, while Nack barely mentions Hollis in his book, Wallace subtly portrays him as a semi-villain. It would be impossible to show in a Disney movie the abusive nature of Hollis, but instead he was played by Dylan Baker as an incompetent man. He was constantly in his sister's way, trying to sway her in the wrong direction at the coin toss, fearing to be involved in the breeding business, while Lane, on the contrary, plays a decisive and firm Penny, who even stands up to her brother and husband once Hollis decides to drag her to court (Secretariat). What made Hollis an even more dislikeable character in the film was that he tried to sell Secretariat throughout the whole movie, only to finally come to the Belmont with his tale between his legs and cheer him on when a win was certain (Secretariat). This was not far from the truth, since Hollis was the one to take the leads on Secretariat after the race and walked him into the winner’s circle for the fans and press at the Belmont (Nack 402). It is only when Nack's facts are combined with Wallace's subtler version that we reach the truth which Tweedy presents us with in his documentary.

In spite of Lane's portrayal of Penny, she was not a Disney princess and her story was not a fairy tale (HT2FF 1:58). Many pieces of her life remained unaddressed, which is why the documentary was so necessary in revealing what was behind the woman, who was behind Secretariat. One of her main characteristics was that she was very much in control of the situation and learned how to keep a strong facade and never let others know what she was thinking, especially in her weakest moments. For this, she received her first lesson from her father at the Kentucky Derby in 1950, when he "gave her hell" for crying once their horse lost (Penny & Red 18:57). Chris told her to never embarrass the horse like that
and she learned from then on how to behave in public and how to hide her real feelings in general (HT2FF 1:15). This control showed best when she was cornered by her brother Hollis and sister Margaret to sell the business where she cunningly used "the daddy card" (Christine), making an emotional plea to them to keep it, for it was what father would have wanted, knowing they would cave and do things her way, at least while Chris was still alive (Penny & Red 23:45).

Penny's story embodies the social trajectory of women who were expected to stay in the kitchen, but she responded by ignoring that and instead commanded respect and wielded power. "It is hard to think of me without self respect, but that's the way I was", Penny recalls in an interview with her son (Penny & Red 21:22). Her marriage was just another relationship where she would be disrespected by a man and it was exactly what her husband did through their marriage, until her mother died and her father was too ill with Alzheimer's disease to run the business, so she finally had a way out. We see in the film how unhappy Jack was with her success and finally tells her at the Belmont Ball how he supports her, but this was just a Disney version, because Disney did not deal with bad marriages and divorce (Secretariat). "The days as Jack Tweedy’s housewife and cocktail party companion in Denver were behind her, and she knew it then, though she would not announce the divorce until early 1974" (Nack 416). Her second marriage to Lennart Ringquist, a Disney executive from Los Angeles, ended in divorce as well (Christine), but it was not her failed marriages that bothered Penny it was her bad relationship with her children. While Lane portrays Penny as a doting mother who tries to juggle everything, in the documentary we are told that she simply was either absent or terrifying, as John mentions in a press conference regarding his documentary: "She was volcanic... we were scared of it, it was terrible" (HT2FF 15:35). She stopped working around the demands of her family and started saying "What I have to do is important, too, and I will do it even if it means missing something" (Nack 159). The resentment and anger Penny had was often unleashed on her children, which was why they saw the movie in a very different way from everyone else, since they knew what was going on behind the scenes at the time. Disney did Kate Tweedy justice by showing off her rebellious spirit as a young girl protesting against the Vietnam War, preparing banners, and it also added to the feminist note led by Penny as a protagonist, showing how her daughter followed in her footsteps by becoming a strong-
willed, courageous young woman who was not afraid to stand up for what she believed in (Smith 1:32). However, Disney movies cannot immerse the audience into too much reality, which was why even though we saw Penny miss her daughter's play and argue with her husband, they all come together happily at the Belmont Ball as one big happy family – which as Kate mentions in an interview did not happen, not only because their parents relationship was strained, but also because the children were simply not invited to the Belmont Ball (Smith 2:30). Kate published Secretariat's Meadow the same year the Disney film came out and had to deal with the many inaccuracies of her family life that prompted her book, because people would come to her with their thrilling experiences from the film telling her what a wonderful childhood she had when it was anything but (HT2FF 21:55).

One of the main occurrences that the book and the film do not include was the affair between Penny and her trainer Lucien Laurin. In the film we see Penny hug Lucien and then her husband which can also be seen in the actual footage of the event that took place at the Belmont in the stands when Secretariat won. John recalls what an agonizing moment that was for him and what a tense situation for the three adults. Even though Lucien was their mother's lover, both John and Kate spoke highly of him and criticized John Malkovich's version of Lucien. Malkovich was dressed in eccentric clothes and did dramatic gestures such as burning the clippings of his failed races in a barn the night before the Belmont, which was completely unrealistic because no trainer would light a fire in a barn and endanger the animals. John describes Lucien as an "incredibly courtly, wonderful man and no one's side-kick" (HT2FF 9:12), while Kate criticized the Disney film for portraying him "as a buffoon" which was quite disappointing since he was very smart (Smith 5:07). In all Disney movies, the heroine has to have a laughable side-kick for the purpose of comic relief and Penny was no exception. In her case he came in the form of John Malkovich as Lucien.

"My actions, my decisions all grew out of my own feelings, and my own needs. I just happened to be a woman in a man's world… When I say I'm not a feminist, I am... in the sense that I want women to be free to be themselves." (Patton)

It was a pioneering gesture to involve the fans in the horse's success, since owners like her father were old-school and never mingled with the crowd. Penny was far-sighted when it
came to the sport and believed that owners had an obligation to the fans to not alienate them, for they would become shareholders in the industry as well (Durkin 10:38). This was a business move, since all owners are concerned about their horses' shares, but Penny knew how to work a crowd. Such revolutionary thinking from a woman was unheard of in the horse racing world, but Penny "did more than own this magnificent horse; she became a spokesperson for women jockeys and owners across the country" (Meltz).

The one male character that did not seem to drag Penny down, but placed her in the spotlight and gave her a voice instead was Red. Secretariat, born on March 30, 1973, was called Red by people close to him. The documentary and the film might not have revolved around him, but Penny did. It will never be known what Red might have achieved as a four-year-old fully grown horse. If Chris Chenery had lived for one more year Penny would not have had to syndicate him in order to pay the inheritance taxes and Red would have been able to race for another year. Nack predicted in the documentary's press conference that people would have seen something they had never seen before, which was what Red had actually already done – and no one has seen a horse do what he did since. Former Pimlico general manager Chick Lang said, "He looked like a Rolls-Royce in a field of Volkswagens" (Flatter), and he was very different from other horses and Lucien had to train him differently. He was trained hard, Nack told the press, he had an insatiable appetite for work, for the harder you worked him the faster he ran (HT2FF 19:15). A famous quote written by Charles Hatton states "his only point of reference is himself" which still remains true after 45 years (Flatter).

6. Conclusion

For the most part Penny Chenery has all the qualities of a Disney princess: beauty, determination, prevailing against all odds and is ever gentle and kind, but combined with the facts from William Nack's book Secretariat: the Making of a Champion and the additional missing pieces from the story found in John Tweedy's documentary Penny & Red we come to a very different image of this fierce woman. As Secretariat happens to be the greatest horse in American history, his owner Penny Chenery makes a legacy of her
own – as a woman who succeeds at breeding and owning a Triple Crown winner in a time when women were hardly even visible in the equestrian world, let alone allowed to set examples. Even though Nack's book documents the developing years of Secretariat, focusing on his racing years as a two and three year old colt, up to his later stud years, Penny is a constant breeze throughout the story – but Nack never gives her a just amount of the spotlight. Rightly so, as Secretariat is his primal focus, but one must consider that Penny was by this horse's side every step of the way. Randall Wallace, on the other hand may have mellowed the storyline, but he did give Penny the lead role in the Secretariat movie. Her feminist predispositions blossom as the plot develops and while leaving Secretariat as a supporting role, Penny goes on to establish a position as a woman who prevails in a male dominated sport while maintain her role as wife and mother. The documentary *Penny & Red* eventually came to help put Disney's movie into perspective and link it with the facts from Nack's book. It is an appreciation of all three versions of this story that a clear and realistic picture of Penny and Secretariat finally appears. As Nack's book was an inspiration and source of crucial information for Wallace's film, so did the film have a hand in Tweedy's documentary; for if it was not for the film and it's softened edges and omitted facts which were necessary in order to make it more viewer-friendly and pleasing for a wider audience as Disney's films are expected to be, the need to bring the whole story to light might not have occurred. Penny is not in this case only the voice speaking candidly of her own life, but of the time she lived in and the ever unnoticed overshadowed position women have in the equestrian sports, whether they be owners, daughters or housewives – all roles she played at one time or another. She was also, more importantly, the voice of the horse that stunned the public in 1973 by breaking all three Triple Crown records, and that still keeps us all in awe for holding these same records to this day.
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