

## "Horsetalk" Record-Review

12/29/00

by Jill Murphy

The horse world has lost a friend with the death of equine artist Sam Savitt on Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>. Sam was a dear friend and neighbor of mine here in North Salem where he lived with his wife Bette and their dogs and horses. When I moved to my farm here over twenty years ago and met Sam at a party, I couldn't believe that I was actually speaking to the illustrator of my favorite horse books like Gordon Wright's classic "Ride, Hunt and Show" and the posters that had hung in my tack room and on my bedroom wall for so many years. I had truly met a legend.

Sam didn't act much like a legend though, he was very friendly and approachable with a great sense of humor. He loved to tell stories. He gave many classes to teach others how to draw horses and one story he told was about a class he was giving down in Virginia that was open to everyone, not just experienced artists. According to Sam, one senior citizen in the class was very enthusiastic but totally hopeless at drawing. Sam always advised his students that if they were having trouble with a drawing to go away and leave it for awhile and then come back and look at it again to get a new perspective. On the night before the final class, Sam was looking at the elderly man's drawing with some of the other students, all of them shaking their heads at how awful it was, when Sam playfully asked them: "Shall I fix it?". They all agreed that he should, so with a few strokes of his pencil and a little erasing, voila! It actually looked like a horse. They all waited gleefully for the next day to see what the old gentleman would

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think of his "improved" work. He came in to class and examined his drawing from all angles and then turning to Sam he said: " You know you were right, it looks much better today, I guess I'm not so bad after all."

Sam truly loved all kinds of horses and had a wonderful life traveling all over the world to draw and paint them. He still kept a horse at home that he cared for himself but his work allowed him to go to the Olympics and to the Grand National Steeplechase in England and out west to draw the wild horses and cowboys as well, Sam loved them all. The last time I saw him was when he stopped by my farm to see our foal a couple of months ago and he was delighted with her too.

Sam told me that a couple of years ago he was walking in front of the Plaza Hotel in New York City where the hansom cabs wait for fares and he stopped to look at the horses. The drivers were all sitting on a stone wall drinking coffee and one of them called to him: "Hey mister, would you move that horse up a few steps?". Sam picked up the rein, clucked and moved the horse up, as he was walking away he heard the driver say to the others: "See, I told you that guy knew horses!"

Yes, that guy knew horses.

There will be a memorial service for Sam Savitt and a celebration of his life sometime in the spring at a date to be announced.