

[Tom Nolan and 'Jerry,' A Horse]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 11 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12 Street, New York City

DATE January 26, 1939

SUBJECT "TOM NOLAN AND "JERRY", A HORSE"

1. Date and time of interview January 22, 1939
2. Place of interview 63 Washington Sq. So., New York City
3. Name and address of informant Tom Nolan (ho, eless)
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Harry Reece (Daca) 63 Washington Sq. So., New York City
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12 Street, New York City

DATE January 26, 1939

SUBJECT "TOM NOLAN AND 'JERRY', A HORSE"

1. Ancestry Irish - American
2. Place and date of birth Unknown (73 years of age)
3. Family None
4. Places lived in, with dates New York City
5. Education, with dates Apparently very little
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Horse-truck driver for years. At present, no occupation.
7. Special skills and interests Apparently none
8. Community and religious activities Not active
9. Description of informant About 6 feet tall — gray blues — ruddy — robust — weight about 180 lbs. Rough, outdoor type.

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10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

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ADDRESS 86 West 12 Street New York City

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SUBJECT "TOM NOLAN AND 'JERRY', A HORSE"

"Daca", (Harry Reece) introduced me to Tom Nolan. It was at Daca's bookstore, 63 Washington Square So., one evening a while before dusk. We were standing on the steps that led down into the store, watching the straggling stream of humanity drifting by...and tossing cigarettes a fourth or a fifth smoked out on the walk for the 'mootchers' who frequent that neighborhood to 'shoot'. Daca said: 'the poor devils get a thrill as if they'd suddenly had a bit of good luck when they find a 'long-snipe'....

"While Daca was reaching for another cigarette to make 'second-handed' for some poor devil to whom a less than half burned smoke was a treat, Tom Nolan came along.

Daca had known 'Old Tom' for years and no doubt had frequently supplied this husky, homeless old Irish-American with the price of a 'flop' or the two-bits for a plate of kidney stew, or set up of liver and onions at one of the cheap restaurants on some of the side streets below the Square.

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Old Tom paused; Dacca drew his tobacco pouch from his pocket and held it out to Tom...

“Fill up your pipe Tom and fog up a little. Here's an old typewriter pounder Pal of mine, I think would like to chew up some ‘horse talk, with you...He's a busted up old Texas cow-puncher and you're quite a horseman yourself, Tom, so between you you ought to cook up some good ‘palaver’ — Kid, meet Tom Nolan who knows more about New York City truck-horses than any man out of a museum, and Tom, meet ‘th’ Kid’ who has in his day taught a lot of mean bronchos how to be good!...”

That was my introduction to Tom Nolan.

Later, sitting on a bench in Washington Square, Tom Nolan told me this story of himself and of ‘Jerry’, a horse:

“So, ye've been something of a ‘horseman’ in your day, have ye,” Old Tom began. “Well, I've had me share of experience with horses, meself... Meaning, of course not them wild and wicked ‘man-eatin’ bronchos like I've heard they have in Texas and other places out West. The horses I've had experience with were horses like, well, like ‘Jerry’, for instance. The big, strong, quiet steady-goin' fellows that used to do the haulin' for the City of New York.

“Ah. yes, Lad, Jerry was a great horse! A ‘he-man’ horse if ye know what I mean. He was a city horse but not a society’ horse; he had no ‘docked’ tail and he would have taken no prizes at a ‘horse show’ beauty contest.

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“But he was proud, I'll say that for the old devil; proud of his strength and proud to use it when I called on him to get down an' dig with an extra heavy load on the truck behind him... That was the kind of horse that ‘Jerry’ was. He wanted to earn his oats and hay and by God he did!

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“For twelve years I drove Jerry, workin' all the time for the same company, and right down there below the Square, just off of Macdougall Street was the upstairs stable where Jerry roomed and boarded.

“Jerry was what you call a ‘fle-bitten’ gray, better than seventeen hands high with weight accordin' which was more than eighteen hundred pounds which is quite a lot of ‘horse’, me Boy, ye must agree...

“But Jerry needed to be a lot of horse. My truck was built for a load of better than two tons and Jerry alone not only started it from a dead stop when full loaded but the old Boy kept it movin' after he started it and took it wherever it had to be taken, askin' no help from anyone!

“No matter what the season, when Jerry and me started with a load we got there with it, 'twas the same in the winter when the streets was glassy with ice, or in the summer when it was hotter than hell under th' ‘El’ and everywhere else in New York City.

“But ye can be sure that in winter when 'twas slippery I was careful to see that he had ice-chains on his shoes to keep him from slippin' and breakin' a leg, or maybe his neck; and in summer when it was so hot that other horses and men too were often droppin' no matter where we was, I saw that Jerry had water and plenty of it, at least every hour. I have no use for a man that neglects his horse — there is something wrong with such a man.

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“Never did I put Jerry to bed in his stable down there just off of Macdougall Street without givin' him a good rub down, massagin' his tough old hide with curry comb and brush till all the sweat was back and his belly and his legs and his hair was layin' smooth and soft; it took the kinks out of his muscles and relaxed him for a good night's rest. And never also did I tell him good night without givin' him the bit of tobaccy for which he was always beggin' — Maybe he knew that tobaccy was good for his stomach and kept him from

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gettin' 'bots' and other worms that horses get sometimes and that makes life miserable for them.

"It was a pleasant life Jerry and me led for them twelve years, we worked hard and we were willing to work hard, but we were livin' and we were contented. Maybe too damned contented and satisfied— Him imaginin' that he'd always have a stall to go to at night and hay and oats to eat; me deludin' myself with th' idea that I'd always be drawin, wages enough to pay for me room over on Barrow Street, me meals, and enough left over to buy a shirt or pair of gloves or shoes once in a while, tobaccy to keep me pipe loaded and feed Jerry sometimes, and even a few schooners of beer if I became too damned thirsty.

"'twas a pleasant life and Jerry and me was so well contented we got to be regular damned 'conservatives' — thinkin' things would never change— Then, by God they changed!

"We waked up one morning and the boss told us we were 'obsolete!' Motor trucks had made us 'obsolete'. I'll always remember that damned word... That's what he said: "Tom, this will be the last 5 day for you and Jerry. Motor trucks have made horse trucks obsolete in New York City. They are too slow, it takes too long for them to get around and so we've got to substitute motor trucks that can move faster and haul more, so, today is the last day for you and Jerry, Tom — Like I say, horse trucks are 'obsolete!'"

"'Obsolete!' 'tis a hell of a word, Lad — I've had lots of time since th' boss sprung it on me to find out what it means. It means you're like a damned 'dodo' bird— Ye're out of date— Ye are needed no more— 'tis indeed a hell of a word!

"When I put Jerry to bed that night I felt lonesome— I gave him an extra tin of oats and a double-sized chew of tobaccy...

"Then, I went to me room and wondered what the hell I would do...the boss had told me I was too old for a job on the new motor trucks; and then I got to thinkin' what the hell they would do with Jerry. Would they, I wondered, send him over to Barren Island to be made

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into fertilizer — or maybe to the soap factory or the glue works over in Jersey. It made the cold sweat break out on me to think of such a thing happenin' to Jerry and damned little did I sleep that night.

“So, the next mornin' I went to the office and I said to the Boss, “Say, Boss, what the hell you goin, to do with Jerry— Ye ain't goin' to send him to no fertilizer plant or to no soap or glue factory are ye?”

“The Boss laughed and said: ‘Hell,no, Tom! Jerry has been a faithful servant of the Company for twelve years and he is entitled to a better reward than that— We are sending Jerry out to our Jersey farm where he will have a warm stable, plenty of hay and oats, and can live in comfort and peace th’ rest of his life! It is his due, Tom, and he shall have it...”

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“That eased my mind a lot and I didn't feel so bad, knowin' that Jerry would be taken care of...I would have hated to think old Jerry being turned into fertilizer or soap or glue... Or being without a place to sleep or hay or oats to eat in his old age...”

“So, that's what they did, Lad. They sent Jerry out to a nice farm in Jersey, with plenty to eat and a good place to sleep —

“As for meself ... well...here I am on this damned bench in Washington Square— And I've decided, Lad, that Jerry was a lucky old bastard! He ought to thank God that he's a ‘horse’ and not a man... For 'tis a hell of a sight better to be an ‘obsolete’ horse than to be an ‘obsolete’ man, these days, me Lad!

“‘Obsolete’ — Jesus, 'tis a hell of a word, ain't it?”

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That is the story Tom Nolan told as we sat on the bench in Washington Square and watched 'mootchers' slinking along past us....their eyes cast down, alert for a 'snipe' someone had tossed away.