

## Prologue

Here I was again, a German tourist spending her vacation in South Florida! It was in the summer of 1992 and my 5th trip to Florida, but it was the first time I came during the summer months. My previous visits were during the winter time, just like millions of other tourists who come here each year, spending their vacations to get away from the cold, nasty weather at home. From my very first visit, 4 years earlier, I simply fell in love with Florida and had to come back as often as possible. My biggest dream was to one day permanently move to Florida and spend the rest of my days in that southern paradise!

When I was in my twenties, I traveled extensively on vacations. Naturally, I visited Europe first, later the Caribbean, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — yet nothing compared to Florida. There I had the best of both worlds: the tropical climate with gorgeous beaches and the modern, industrialized luxury of Germany.

Every day for four years, the thought of one day being able to live in Florida never left me. During those years, unable to find a way to make my dream come true, I kept coming back for vacations. By now I was 30 years old and the only English I knew were the few words I still remembered from my school years. But that summer's vacation was a little different — I was by myself and didn't have any plans to visit the typical tourist attractions again. I just wanted to relax and enjoy the beautiful beaches.

One day, driving down I-95, I saw a sign displaying a horse and jockey saying 'Race Track' next exit. As I mentioned before, at that time I didn't speak any English, but I recognized the race horse. I'd never seen that sign during my previous visits and for some unknown reason, I never even thought there might be a race track in Florida. Kind of like: who would race horses in 95-degree weather and extreme humidity? Anyway, I followed the signs and ended up at Calder Race Course. My mind went into overtime. If there were race tracks in Florida, there surely was a way to make my dream come true...

I bought a racing program and entered the stands. Not understanding a single word of the program or those coming from the loudspeakers, I just looked around and watched a few races. I was puzzled and amazed by what I saw: horse racing on a dirt track, ponies leading the thoroughbreds, getting the horses into the starting gate like clockwork and races faster in the beginning than at the end. All these things were totally new to me and opposite of what I knew about horse racing. After watching several races, I decided to find my way behind the scenes only to discover everything was under lockdown and guarded like a military base! Visitors are mostly allowed on the grounds during training hours in Europe - there is no security check to enter the stable areas while stable personnel are present.

In the stable office building, a very friendly gentleman took his time and tried to communicate with me as best as he could. I showed him my German racing license and asked how I could go to the back side and talk to people. He made a few phone calls and arranged for me to meet with someone the next morning to get my guest pass at the stable gate, and then be shown around during training hours. I was there promptly, at 4:30 am the next morning!

For the next few days, a jockey's agent babysat me, showed me around the race track and introduced me to everyone we saw while explaining everything about the backside routine to me — and I didn't even know what a jockey's agent was! The entire training operation was mesmerizing. Now, thinking back on those days, I remember I was very impressed. The only thing I recognized as the same were the young thoroughbred horses and their riders. Everything else seemed way different from the German training and very impressive. Though I didn't understand much of what the agent explained, I went back every morning for several days and somehow, the agent and I learned to “talk” more. I wanted to know if it was possible for me to work there as a rider or a jockey. Not only could I work there, I could also get my green card based on a specialty occupation!

This was the break I'd been hoping for and dreaming of for 4 years! Six months later I moved to Florida, ignoring the warnings and doubts of my friends and family. I was the only person in the world who didn't think I'd gone totally crazy! For 15 years I'd worked at race tracks in Germany and France. Starting as a jockey's apprentice, I learned everything I possibly could and worked as an exercise rider for most of those years. The only thing I never accomplished was actually riding in races. There were always minor problems with my weight and I wasn't willing to use drugs or other common weight loss solutions on a daily basis for the rest of my career.

I had valuable training and experience — and was always willing and open to learning something new. It never occurred to me the horse racing business in the U.S. would be so totally different than the European business. In fact, back then, I had absolutely no knowledge of American horse racing and just assumed the rules and regulations of the international sport were the same worldwide.

When it was time for me to wrap up everything in Germany, my dad tried one last time to convince me to rethink my decision. He was convinced I hadn't completely thought through my decision. He was right. I was ready for another adventure and would simply take things as they came. So I thought.

Even with no knowledge of anything about the American way of life --- political, business or even the people --- I still believed it had to be better than being in Germany. I was young, carefree and knew without a doubt the grass would be much greener on the other side of the fence. And off I went!