

PATHWAY TO STARDOM  
CHAPTER 14: Steep Learning Curve

As soon as the formalities of money transfers, change of ownership and registration of David Tsui as the new owner with France Galop – the ruling body of French racing – were complete.



David Tsui's silk, yellow and purple are Chinese royal colours, the yellow star on the top of the cap means " Lucky star shining high "

I set out to inspect my newly-acquired thoroughbred 'family'. En route to Chantilly, Pierre, my chauffeur, explained that we were bound for the very headquarters of racehorse training in the whole of France.



Lamorlaye gallops



Schooling hurdle training centre at Lamorlaye

Pierre might well have spoken in the same breath of such as Newmarket in England and the Curragh in Ireland, but to me those were just names of places that meant nothing to me. That, of course, was back in 1991, the beginning of a sharp, steep, but swift learning curve; my first step into a world as yet outside my ken.



Ling Tsui 2 hours before the launch of satellite ASIA I

Pierre drew up at the entrance to a 60-box stable formerly made famous as home to trainer Patrick Biancone. By strange coincidence, M. Biancone had chosen to pursue his training career in Hong Kong, whereby Jean Lesbordes had been able to rent his elegant stable complex on the rue Charles Pratt, Lamorlaye. Neighbouring trainers included such well known figures as Francois Boutin, Francois Doumen and Bernard Secly.



Stables at Lamorlaye

If I as a lady owner expected an effusive welcome from M. Lesbordes, I was disappointed. Just as the magazine article had described, Jean Lesbordes was a man of few words. Moreover, of the 45 horses I had just bought, just one seemed to occupy the trainer's thoughts – Urban Sea. As he explained in his gruff fashion, he thought so highly of this young chestnut daughter of Miswaki that he had deliberately stabled her in the box where Patrick Biancone had housed All Along. To his dismay, he then found it necessary to explain that All Along had been trained here to win the 1983 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe and had been voted Horse of the Year. All Along had carried the colours of renowned art dealer and collector Daniel Wildenstein.



Former Patrick Biancone's stable, Christopher Tsui riding on Boulou.

His expression said it all – first a Japanese playboy, now a Chinese ingenue.



maybe in this French countryman's mind- Japanese is Ninja



Chinese is Kung Fu

As M. Lesbordes took me along the line of stables, showing me each of my new 'family' he listed off their names and their pedigrees. To my astonishment, many of them had 'Urban' incorporated in their names. There was Urban Marzina, Urban Mayoko, Urban Sky, Urban Dancing and so on. The only name that made music to my ear related to the first horse I had been shown – Urban Sea. I had a glimpse of these two images in my mind : Horses of the Sea and Fairy of the Sea.



Horses of the Sea, Chinese emperors' horses



Fairy of the Sea, Chan Hon Goh, my goddaughter

The others, I declared, would have to be given new names. M. Lesbordes countered by saying that those names, once registered with France Galop, could not be changed. As to the provenance of those names, they were intended to promote Masakho Sawada's 'Urban' business enterprises, particularly his plush leisure and recreation centre on the Port de Champs Elysees. Urban Marzina was named after Sawada's secretary and Urban Mayoko after his wife and so on. Only when he had exhausted his repertoire of family and senior employees had Sawada resorted to Urban Sea, Urban Sky, Urban Dancing. Other horses such as Adieu au Roi or Take Risks had

been named by their breeders before they were sold to Mr. Sawada.



Ling Tsui and Ting Ting Liu, daughter of Liu Shaoqi, former chairman of PRC with Adieu au Roi at Mr. Lesbordes' stable

Faced with this unpalatable fait accompli, the disillusioned owner I was could only respond that the only one of those names acceptable to me was Urban Sea, for the reason that in Chinese astrology I had been born under an 'earth' sign and thus needed 'water' to fertilise my enterprises.



The Chinese law of five elements : Gold, wood, water, Fire and Earth



Following the law of five elements : Earth is strength and water is positivity

It was M. Lesbordes' turn to look mystified. Had the fabled Sport of Kings come to this? Did that man perhaps find himself empathizing with Martin Luther's misogynist dictum – 'Never any good came out of female domination'? However he ignored that China had a female emperor in the name of Wu Zetian.



Wu Zetian, the only female emperor in the history of China ( 618-906AD )

If Urban Sea was to follow in All Along's hoofprints, she would have to be all that M. Lesbordes believed her to be, and then some.



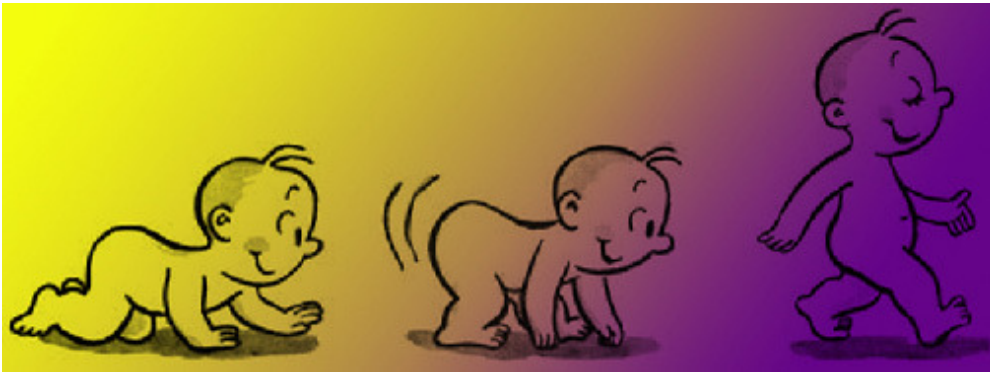
All Along

Ling – my name – may mean 'spirit' in Chinese, but I have always recognized that 'spirit' is only one part of the formula for success. Indeed, my motto has long been: 'learning to win'. Not surprisingly therefore, I surrounded myself with knowledgeable racing and breeding people, entertaining and being entertained in turn. I also got my hands on as many racing and breeding publications as possible, intent on educating myself in the intricacies of what to most people is a secret world.

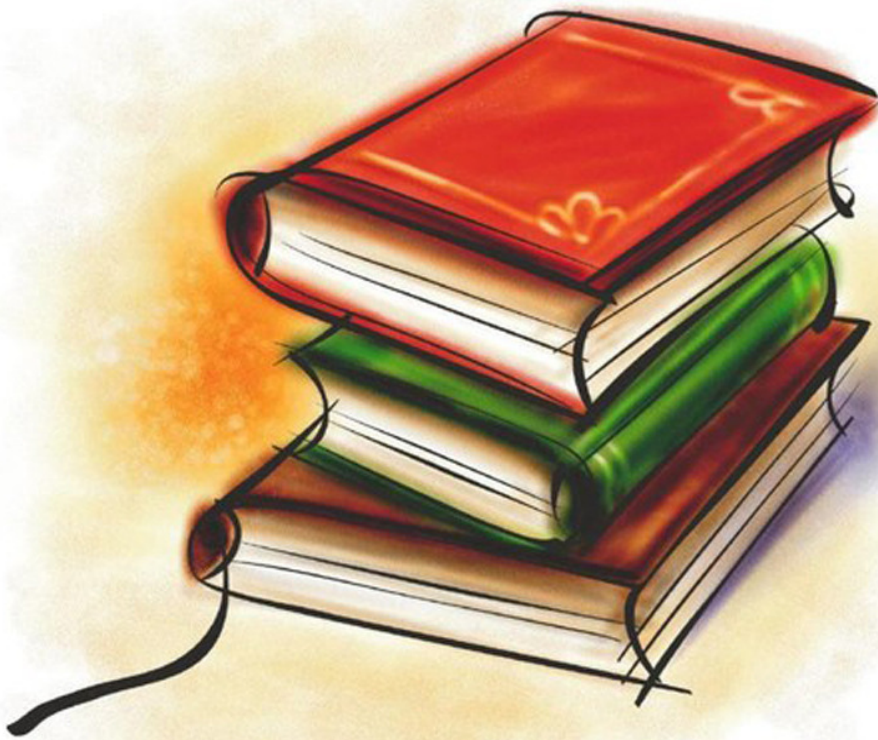


Secret World

Indeed, being a multiple racehorse owner, I succeeded in learning the business to such an extent that even M. Lesbordes began to treat me as a near-equal, telling the curious racing journalists that his new patron had proved almost too good a learner. She had, he declared, progressed too quickly. This, in time, was to cause strain in this owner-trainer relationship, though not in the early stages.



Babies learning how to walk



learning to win