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The first two jewels in horseracing's Triple Crown have been particularly exciting this year. Stories from the track have thrilled us and touched us. I'm thinking that a horse race must be a metaphor for something. The trouble is, I'm not exactly sure what.

First, there was the Kentucky Derby. A fifty-to-one long shot sailed over the finish line and claimed first place. This heroic race suggests that a horse race is about underdogs or triumph over the establishment. The Mine that Bird team looked good for it: an ex-rodeo rider with a big black cowboy hat and a broken leg for a trainer, a Cajun jockey with only an elementary school education and a plucky three year old on a losing streak.

At two, Mine that Bird was a Canadian champion. But oh, what a difference a year makes. At three, Mine that Bird was down on his luck. Maybe it was a sign of the times but the horse was having a bad year. So maybe horseracing isn't about bucking the establishment, maybe it's about second chances and getting your stride back. It's tough to get old, even if it's only the ripe old age of three.

And who hasn't ever been in a slump? Maybe you're in one now. Whether it takes 2 minutes and 2.66 seconds, several weeks, months or even a year or two, there's nothing like climbing back on top. And hey, the nice thing about life's winner's circle, unlike horseracing, you get to define victory. Winning doesn't have to be huge; it just has to be sweet.

Then came the Preakness and the stunning filly, Rachel Alexandra. She didn't run in the Derby and she wasn't registered for the Preakness until the last minute. In spite of her string of spectacular victories, it seems her owners were old school. They didn't think she should run with the boys.

Less than a week to go before the starting bell at Baltimore, Rachel Alexandra was sold. She ran straight into the arms of new, more open-minded owners. Just in the nick of time, Rachel Alexandra was entered in the Preakness. She ran head to head with the boys and for the first time in eighty-five years, a filly was the first across the finish line at Pimlico.

So it looks like horseracing might also be about catching a break; getting and then taking the chance to shine. Next time you hesitate to try something new because you're a girl, too young, too old, too whatever, think again. Besides, it's not just about winning. Most of the time, winning isn't even terribly important. Most of the time, participation is what matters.

The Belmont Stakes are fast approaching. Bookies are figuring out the odds. Owners, trainers and jockeys are scrutinizing the competition, the track and the weather forecast. And the horses? Well I guess the horses are doing whatever they do to get ready for a race ... relax? meditate? load up on carbs?

When it's over, maybe we can figure out if and why life is like a horse race. For now, you might want to think about inviting friends and family over for the Triple Crown's final jewel. The Belmont Stakes are not as fancy as the Derby or Preakness. Big hats are optional, shorts and sneakers are definitely ok. Grab a bouquet of white carnations, whip up a batch of Belmont Breeze and fire up the grill for fun and festivity. The race only lasts a few minutes; you'll have all evening to celebrate ... and ponder any lessons learned. Enjoy and,

Bon appétit!

Susan

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Zuppa Fragola-Rabarbaro (Strawberry-Rhubarb Soup)

This refreshing dessert soup is a sure bet. A little sweet, a little tart it is the perfect ending to a warm weather feast. Enjoy!

Serves 6

1/2 pound rhubarb, chopped
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 inch piece ginger, finely grated
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch freshly ground pepper
Pinch kosher salt
Juice of 1/2 lime
Juice of 4 oranges (about 2 cups)
1/2 pound strawberries, hulled and chopped
Zuppa Inglese (recipe follows)
Garnish: grated lime zest

1. Put the rhubarb, sugar and juices in a saucepan, bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce heat and simmer, covered, until mushy. Let cool completely.
2. Put the rhubarb and strawberries in a blender or food processor and process until smooth. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
3. Spoon the soup into serving bowls or glasses, drizzle with Zuppa Inglese, garnish with lime zest and serve.

Zuppa Inglese

1/2 cup sugar
3 egg yolks
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup cream
Grated zest of 1 orange
Grated zest of 1/2 lime
2 teaspoons Grand Marnier
Pinch nutmeg

1. Prepare an ice bath fitted with a medium bowl; set aside.
2. Put the yolks, zest and sugar in a small saucepan; whisk to combine. Whisk in the milk and cream. Cook, stirring constantly until the custard reaches 170 degrees on a candy thermometer. Strain the custard through a fine mesh sieve into the bowl set in the ice bath. Stir in the Grand Marnier and nutmeg; let cool completely. Refrigerate until ready to serve.