

*Richard L. Duchossois
at his "Hill 'N' Dale home
in Barrington Hills
on March 11, 2019.*

*Photography by
Linda M. Barrett*

Congratulations!
Richard L. Duchossois
will be inducted into
the National Museum of
Racing and Hall of Fame
on August 2, 2019.

The Indomitable Mr. D

STORY BY BARBARA L. BENSON

GRACIOUS, SMILING, DAPPER, IN QUIET COMMAND of a lifetime of memories spanning war and peace, fire and pain, family joy and sorrow, and incredible personal accomplishment. Richard L. Duchossois, in his 98th year, is a man of completeness.

This rare and privileged interview becomes a conversational journey from the Western Suburbs, across the Atlantic in 1944, through French country roads and fields, the towns and villages ripped apart by criss-crossing armies; into ancestral Alsace, and then to Germany to experience the disintegrating structure of the Third Reich. The journey will continue home again to the ever-expanding horizons of challenge and opportunity in post-war industrial America, of marriage and a growing family that will become a devoted clan, and a fateful turn that would see him become host to millions at a horseracing venue to rival any in the Western world, and where he would become affectionately known as “Mr. D”.

The conversation begins in the early years, which provided the cradle and circumstances that nurtured this exceptional man. He recalls his parents, third-generation Americans, with ancestry in the Alsace region of France. His great-grandfather was not happy when the Alsace was ceded to Germany after the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, and brought his family to America, settling in New Jersey. Some family members followed the pioneer roads west to Indiana, and then to Philadelphia, where his father, Alphonse Duchossois, was born in 1896.

Moving to Chicago, he married Ernestine Hoessler, and they lived in Beverly, a then sparsely populated Southwestern Suburb of Chicago. Theirs was a comfortable but not wealthy home. Alphonse Duchossois served in the Navy in World War I, but he was not especially militaristic in outlook. Their four children, Marguerite the eldest, were raised with a benevolent discipline giving them a sense of duty and responsibility. Wanting the best education possible for their children, Morgan Park Military Academy was the school of choice for their three boys, Richard being the eldest, born in 1921. A highly regarded school with a seven-day-a-week curriculum of education, military instruction, and drill provided the environment where discipline prevailed, and leadership qualities emerged.

Duchossois graduated from Morgan Park Military Academy in 1940, qualified to become a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Reserves. He entered Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, which functioned on an honor system. But Morgan Park Academy would impact his life in its entirety. Besides the emergence of his enduring steadfast character, he had met Beverly Thrall, the daughter of Mildred and A.J. Thrall, during the summers where both of their families had homes at Indian Lake in Dowogiac, Michigan. There was little to suggest that life would follow anything but a normal course—graduation, perhaps marriage, and maybe going into business.

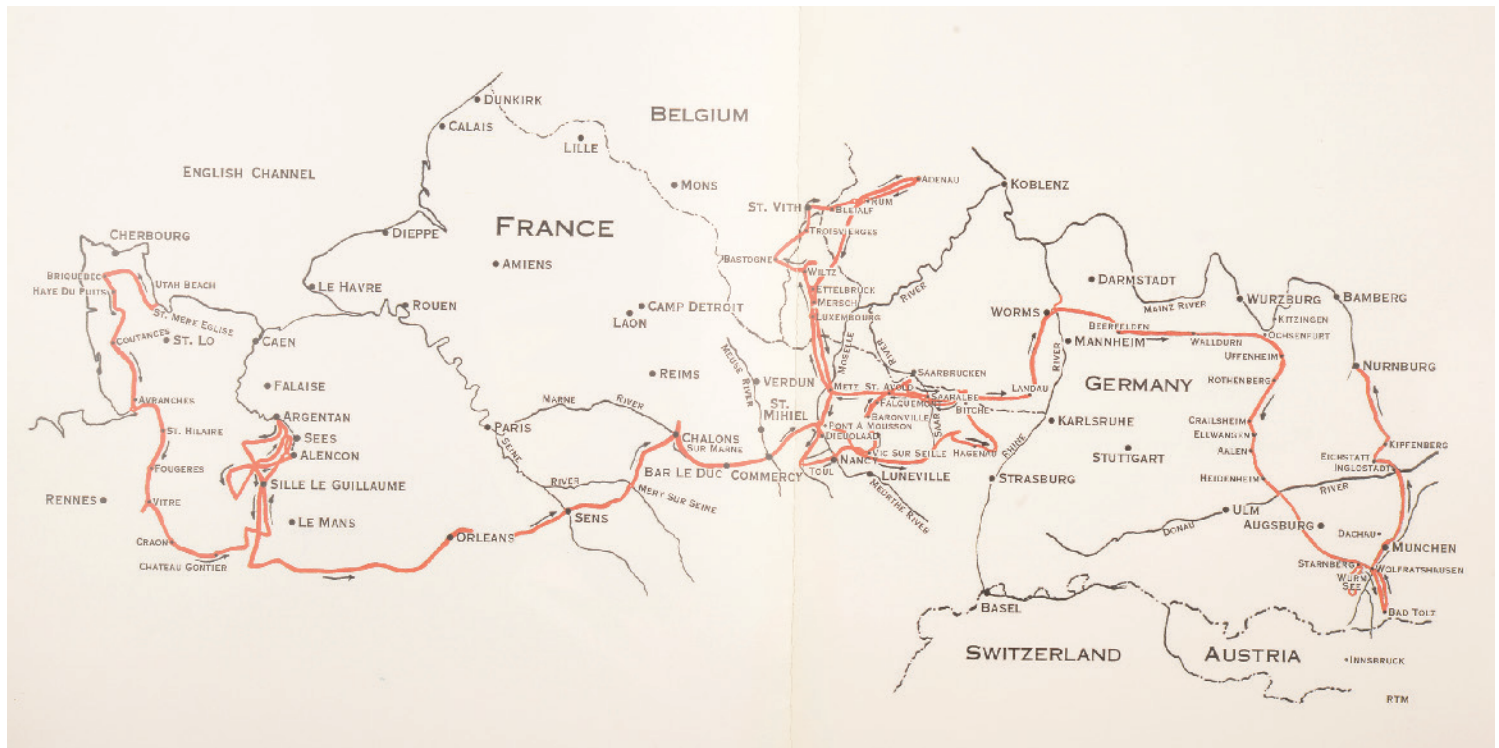


Beverly and Richard Duchossois

A DAY IN INFAMY

It all changed with the enshrined words of President Franklin Roosevelt: “On December 7, 1941, a day that will live in infamy”, announcing the bombing of Pearl Harbor. “We are at war with the Empire of Japan”. The young men at Washington and Lee heard the news with a question mark, “Where was Pearl Harbor?”

For Richard Duchossois the “what’s next” answer would come in January 1942, when, as he recalls, he was summoned into the President’s office at Washington and Lee and given orders to report to the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant at Camp Robinson in Little Rock, Arkansas. As a graduate of a military academy, it was quickly recognized, as he wryly puts it, “he knew his left from his right foot”, and his first assignment was teaching recruits bayonet fighting. A quick overnight session with a Sergeant Major ensured a successful bayonet class the next day.



Richard Duchossois has given interviews about World War II to West Point, the National World War II Museum (New Orleans), and the Pritzker Military Academy. These interviews may be found online.

This marked the beginning of his life of steadfastness, grasping the task at hand, realizing that he was responsible for the leadership and well-being of his fellow men, of which he was the youngest. He enjoyed the new experiences, and they came fast. Within five days it was on to the new Camp Hood in Texas where they lived in tents, and learned that they were training in a new Army unit called Tank Destroyers. The next two years were spent moving from camp to camp, anticipating the action to come, and always, he and Beverly kept in touch, meeting when they could. On July 24, 1943 they were married.

In May 1944, now Commander of Company C of the 610th Tank Destroyer Battalion, he crossed with them to Scotland in the requisitioned liner *New Amsterdam*. Working their way in readiness down through England, they heard the news of the mighty landings on the beaches of Normandy, D-Day, June 6, 1944. From a Landing Transport, Company C landed on Utah Beach several days later. Here would begin the experiences, seared in the hearts and minds forever, of officers and men alike.

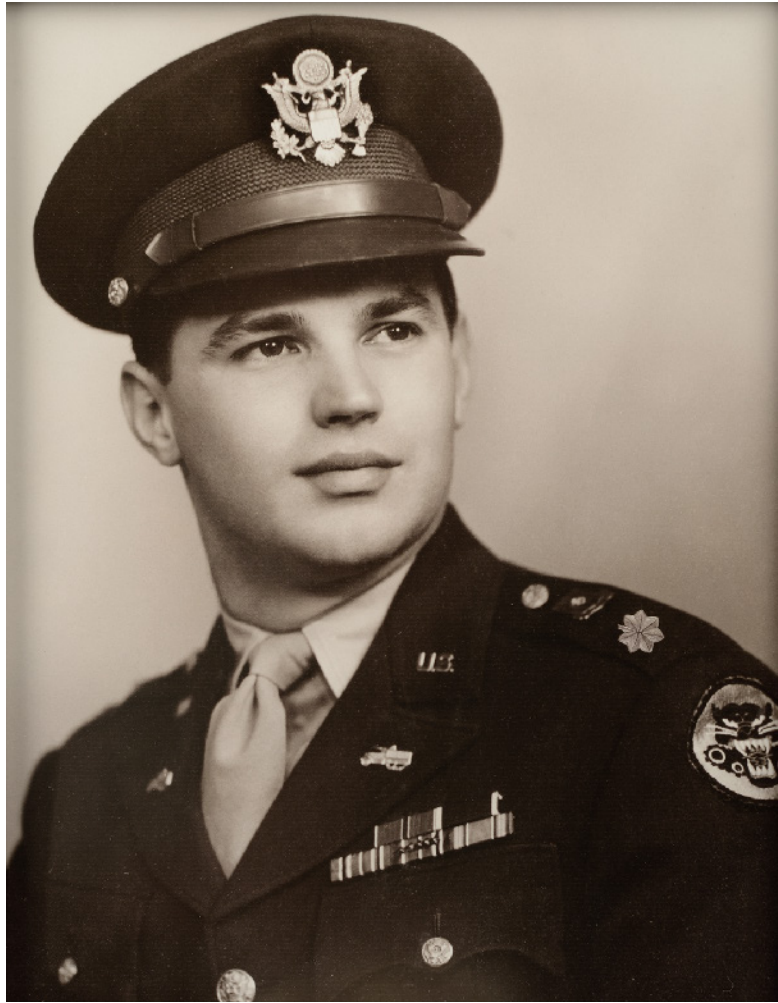
Richard Duchossois believes that each man would remember the action, the terror, the loss, the camaraderie that measured their days from their own perspectives. For him, paramount was the job to be done, and he needed to offer dispassionate leadership to ensure the survival of his men.

General Patton's Third Army arrived and the 610th was attached to the 80th Division. Patton's attitude to duty and service filtered through the ranks, and reinforced Duchossois' own code of discipline and honor, which would become the hallmarks of his life. Under Patton, they began moving forward into Central France. They fought through Normandy, enduring heavy fighting in the Argentan-Falaise Gap and losing much of their battalion leadership. This was the last major battle in Normandy. With Patton's Third

Army, in their vehicles and tank destroyers, Company C then swiftly crossed France, often through legendary towns and villages from an earlier World War. French civilians were helpful in advising them where the Germans were and where they had been.

By late summer, the Army had reached the west side of the Moselle River at Pont-a-Mousson just west of Metz, and the Germans had regrouped. They were throwing everything at the Americans. There was very hard fighting, but American forces did build a bridgehead and got across the Moselle. There the Germans counter-attacked with their very strong force and the Americans were overrun. Trying to reconnoiter what was happening, but alone in his jeep without a radio, Duchossois was hit by a German's small arms fire. He was shot through the side and across his spine, the bullet shocking the nerves and the muscles in his back. He was temporarily paralyzed from the shoulders down. Under fire, members of his company came and pulled him out and he was taken back across the Moselle to his Battalion Surgeon.

Eventually, he was put on the first U.S. Hospital Train heading to Paris from Verdun. Placed in a room with three other officers, he slept a lot with painkillers. Every time he woke up, there were different men in the beds around him. He remembers that he had been wounded on the 15th of September and after a few weeks he was still barely able to walk. His simple statement that "his men found out where he was, and sent a vehicle for him to go back to his battalion" says much about the regard in which he was held. Technically, he should have been invalided out, but he also says that there were so many people in the hospital that he wasn't missed! He resumed command of his Company, but at first, badly crippled, his duties were assumed by his officers. Again, the Battalion Surgeon took care of him.



Richard Duchossois was awarded a Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars for his service in World War II.

As he returned to his command, the Third Army received orders to immediately go north to Bastogne. Here they fought in the historic Battle of the Bulge and finally saw the beginnings of victory. After that it was mostly snipers, as the German resistance crumbled. Now transferred to the 7th Army, they crossed the Saar River into Germany and onto Worms where they crossed the Rhine, then looping southward towards Munich.

At the war's formal end, when Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, Company C was south of Munich. They had witnessed the utter horror as the concentration camps opened and what survivors there were staggered out. The operation of the camps created an odious pall, inhaled even from a distance. In later years, he quietly articulates the appalling conditions, what many never talked about when they came home. But home was several months away, as he was assigned to Military Governor of Kreis Eichstadt. For about three months, a few fellow officers and men ran Kreis Eichstadt, somewhat larger than a county, but not as big as a state.

They found the people astonishingly disciplined, used to asking permission for almost everything, including visiting relatives in the next town. That produced one memorable occasion when an elderly couple asked if they could kill their pig and take it with them. No problem, and they went on

their way. Later, they returned tearfully, saying they had not been told how they should divide up the pig. Their lives were controlled by authority. Not speaking German, Duchossois was fortunate to have an English-speaking secretary, the wife of a German general, who seemed to know more about Chicago than he did.

After being relieved of occupation duty, they went to Nuremburg, where the Air Force had dropped a bomb right in the middle of the Grand Hotel. Once they had cleared the rubble and prepared the hotel for military occupancy, the war crimes commission went in and took it over. They came home on Liberty ships and were discharged at Camp McCoy in early 1946. Richard Duchossois achieved the rank of Major and was awarded the Purple Heart for his injuries in combat at the Moselle River. Other actions earned him two Bronze Stars. He was tired and battle-scarred, along with millions of others, but what was an innate sense of discipline and duty had seen him through, and he has a deep belief that the experiences of those years have defined his life. Beverly awaited him with their son Craig, born in 1944, after he left for Europe. They had lived with Beverly's parents, and now, as he adjusted to civilian life, A.J. Thrall literally took his son-in-law to work in the family business.



Before his company left Camp Atterbury, young Commander Richard Duchossois (left, foreground) presented recognition medals to some of the enlisted men.

JOINING THRALL CAR

As he recalls it, the day after New Year's in 1946, his father-in-law said, "I am going to work on January 2nd and you are coming with me, and that's your new job!"

"I didn't ask for the job," Duchossois said. "He just told me that's what it would be. I was unemployed, and I took it, and I'm still there!"

Thrall Car Manufacturing Company employed about 38 men and sold repaired railroad freight cars. With responsibility for his family, Duchossois set about adapting his military style and self-discipline to an industrial environment which was more free-and-easy, where his father-in-law and brother-in-law worked on a first-name basis with their men. It would be a while before he would lose some of his rigidity, but he gained respect by expecting excellence of himself and his fellow workers.

He became president of the company in 1951, which he would transform from repairing freight cars, to becoming one of the leading builders and sellers of new railcars in the country.

He evolved a philosophy in business which was quite simply, that you don't chase profits. Instead, if you have the best product, the best discipline, on-time delivery, treat your customer the way that you would want to be treated, innovate, and save money for your customer, the profits would come.

That philosophy would lead Duchossois to the success of later buying Thrall Manufacturing Company from the Thrall family. Through what he terms "not risk, but opportunity", that purchase of Thrall Manufacturing was

the foundation of today's multi-billion-dollar Duchossois Group. He is wary of what he sees as the overused word "morale". He believes that pride is of greater importance. Pride in undertaking well everything that you do will bring a sustaining sense of self-worth.

A GROWING FAMILY

As Thrall Car Manufacturing grew, so did his family. After Craig came Dayle, Bruce, and Kimberly. They built a house in Flossmoor and their lifestyle was that of a typical well-to-do family of those times. Especially Bruce loved animals and took up riding. As he became more successful in the show-jumping ring, there were more weekend drives to Barrington for the competitions there. This weekend driving became an issue.

In 1967, the 600-acre Spring Creek Farm belonging to Ross Siragusa of Admiral Radio and Television, where he had mainly farmed cattle and pigs, became available. The Duchossois family bought it and developed Hill 'N' Dale Farm as one of the foremost Thoroughbred breeding farms in Illinois. Bruce's equine and equestrian expertise was important here; he had become an active member of the Barrington Hills equestrian community and participated in both the United States and Europe.

The family grew. Craig married and joined Duchossois Industries of which he eventually became CEO. Both Dayle and Kimberly married and began their families. But by 1978, a shadow came over their world when Beverly was diagnosed with cancer. Their vibrant, beloved wife and mother



At his 65th birthday celebration at Hill 'N' Dale, Richard Duchossois is joined by his children (from left) Bruce, Kim, Dayle, and Craig.

passed away at the farm in 1980. This changed their lives and their philanthropy gained focus and importance.

In 1983, Kimberly became president of The Duchossois Family Foundation. In memory of Beverly, and in recognition of the superb care that she had received at University of Chicago Medicine, a transformational donation was made to establish the Beverly E. Duchossois Cancer Care Center there. It was the first of several donations to U. of C. Medicine that culminated in the establishment of the Duchossois Family Institute at U. of C. Medicine in 2017.

RISK OR OPPORTUNITY?

In 1983, Duchossois accepted an invitation to attend his first Kentucky Derby. It was all very casual, chatting after the race. He joined a group with Joe Joyce and Sheldon Robbins who were looking for investors to buy the Arlington Park Racetrack from Gulf and Western Industries. As the talk became more convivial, Duchossois agreed to take a 10 percent share. He forgot all about it until a month later when a call came to go downtown to the lawyer's office and sign the papers. Getting there, it became apparent that no one else had any money. Risk or opportunity? A new venture? Richard Duchossois bought the track.

In 1981, the Inaugural Arlington Million, a 1¼ mile race for Thoroughbreds, had been run—the only race in the world to offer a \$1-million dollar purse. After two years, in 1983, due to the quality of the entries, the race was granted a Grade 1 listing. As the head of a now multi-faceted

Eleven Commandments of good business

- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is the most important person in any business.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is not dependent on us—we are dependent on him.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is not an interruption of our work—he is the purpose of it.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
does us a favor when he calls—we are not doing him a favor by serving him.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is part of our business—not an outsider.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is not a cold statistic—he is a flesh and blood human being with feelings and emotions like our own.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is not someone to argue or match wits with.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is a person who brings us his wants—it is our job to fill those wants.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is deserving of the most courteous and attentive treatment we can give him.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is the fellow that makes it possible to pay your salary whether you are a truck driver, plant employee, office employee, salesperson or manager.
- A CUSTOMER . . .**
is the life-blood of this and every other business.

DUCHOSSOIS ENTERPRISES



Members of the Duchossois family who attended the University of Chicago's medical school graduation in 2006 received an Honorary Fellow of the Division of Biological Sciences award. From left: Janet, Craig, Kim, Judi, and Richard. They were invited to walk with the graduates and sit with university leaders during the ceremony.



The academic regalia worn by the four Duchossois Leadership Professors at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

and multi-national corporation, Duchossois didn't go often to the track, and left its management to Joyce and Robbins.

That all changed on July 31, 1985. An electrical fire had started in the ceiling of the Turf Club Lounge. Initially, everything was under control. But at 3:30 that morning Duchossois was woken up and called to the track. The fire would rage for nine hours, bringing in fire departments from 20 communities. By the end of the day, commuters on the adjacent Chicago and Northwestern Railway were seeing the huge heap of rubble that had been the Grandstand. But thankfully, there were no human or animal casualties. However, the Arlington Million was due to be run in three weeks time. Can't be done they told him. And from deep inside, came Richard Duchossois' lifelong response to challenge, and the seemingly impossible. He thinks too, that the spirit of General Patton was still there: "QUIT? HELL NO!"

Jockeys, grooms, concessionaires, groundskeepers, waitstaff, and maintenance personnel all depended on the track for their livelihoods. It annually brought millions into the local economy. In addition, the race was to be televised, and its major sponsor and the television stations said that they could not air the race unless the rubble was completely cleared.

Rallying staff, and most of his family, Duchossois pulled the event together. The rubble was cleared, and the expected 30,000 race goers circulated under red and white striped tents. It was a gloriously festive scene. The Million, run on August 25, 1985 was won by a horse named Teleprompter, owned by the 18th Earl of Derby. The TV commentators dubbed the race "The Miracle Million". The entire track won an Eclipse Award for "A Miracle Well Done".

After that, for the track's principal owner there was no option but to rebuild. Living permanently now at Hill 'N' Dale Farm, his life patterns changed,



To the huge group of people who helped rebuild Arlington Park's facility, Richard Duchossois wrote: Thank you for your hard work. You are making history and have become a part of a great tradition.



with either driving or taking a helicopter to the track on an almost daily basis. Craig Duchossois became CEO of Duchossois Industries, freeing up his father to concentrate on Arlington. As the plans were drawn up, every detail was scrutinized by Duchossois and his daughter Dayle, who became his principal assistant. They and other members of the family were involved almost round the clock. And the dapper man, who walked among the hundreds of workers, took on a new, more easy-going persona, and became their Mr. D.

Arlington International Racecourse reopened on June 28, 1989. The six-story Grandstand, with the largest cantilevered roof in the world at that time, the interior spaces, the great sweeping staircase, had a magnificent and simple elegance. "A racing palace" was among the superlatives used to describe the racecourse.

Mr. D set a new tone on the first day when all the women guests were presented with a rose. He wanted a family-friendly racecourse and there was a special area for children with jugglers, a petting zoo, and pony rides. Concerts, summer festivals, and holding charity events there would enhance its reputation and economic viability beyond that of racing.



Richard Duchossois at his rebuilt Arlington Park.

But horse racing was its claim to fame and an ultimate accolade came when the track hosted the Breeder's Cup races on October 26, 2002. By this time Arlington had acquired 25 percent of Churchill Downs to become their largest stockholder, and there was hesitation about holding it here. Grandstand capacity was 30,000. The races drew up to 45,000 people.

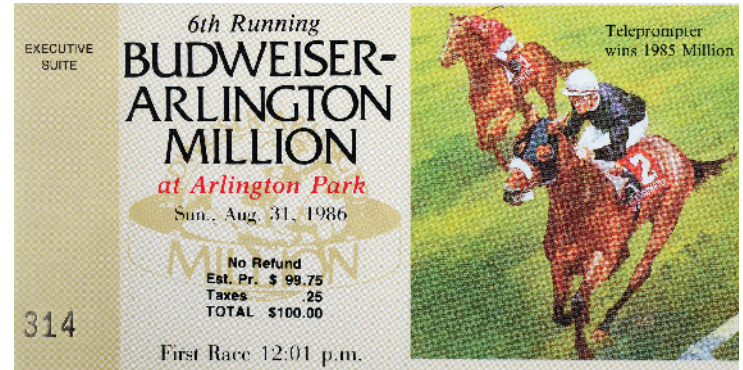
Once again Mr. D. and his team went into action, and temporary stands were built for an additional 15,000 people. The day was an enormous success, thanks to that indomitable spirit of Arlington's leader and the Arlington Park team of workers. In these years too, he survived cancer and a quadruple bypass.

Back in 1987, Richard Duchossois made a very emotional commitment to Arlington, when he sponsored the inaugural Beverly D Grade 1 turf race for fillies and mares three years old and up, in honor of his late wife. It had one of the largest purses for this grade of race. One of his greatest personal satisfactions came in 2010, when his own horse, Éclair de Lune, won the Beverly D. It was the first time he had entered the race, and his pleasure was apparent when he was on the receiving end of the trophy. It also marked a resurgence of attendance at Arlington.

CHANGING TIMES

In 2000, he married again. Judi Marchi and her two sons were added to Duchossois family portraits which with the Duchossois family of children, grandchildren and later, great grandchildren, could number up to 32 among all generations. Although four years ago, there was great sadness when Bruce Duchossois died of cancer. He had become a world renowned equestrian, showing horses in the United States and Europe. In Aiken, South Carolina, Bruce became the driving force behind the area's emergence as a premier show jumping destination. Some of his horses still compete in the Olympics.

As he continues to talk about his life's experiences and influences, Mr. D again turns to the importance of the circumstances in which one is raised. He speaks of the love, and discipline and respect for others which were a part of his youth, both at home and at school. One either faced responsibility or fell behind. It was in the war that leadership became second nature to him. He could not allow an effusive patriotism to overcome a clear head for what he describes as "the job you had to do".



A ticket for the 1986 Budweiser-Arlington Million.

It is not all cut-and-dried in the memory of that once-young soldier, a major at 23 years old. He became a Director of the National World War II Museum, founded in 2000 in New Orleans. He believes everyone should visit this museum, to learn that freedom and independence doesn't come free. It is here that the memories, the oral histories, the words from the battlefields of those who did and did not survive will be preserved. His own depth of feeling for that period of his life frequently emerges in this conversational journey.

D-DAY REMEMBRANCES

2014 marked the 70th Anniversary of D-Day. Solemn ceremonies were planned for the Normandy beaches with attendance by world leaders, including Queen Elizabeth, then 88 years old. Richard Duchossois went with the National World War II Museum's 70th Anniversary D-Day Cruise. He was 92 years old then, one of the very few survivors of what has come to be known as "The Greatest Generation". There were several WWII veterans on the cruise, and meeting them on land, to tour the beaches and sites of Normandy D-Day battles. He said that he was honored to be there. He was with thousands more veterans at the magnificent 70th National Commemoration at the Omaha Beach American Cemetery on June 6, 2014.

In the course of their visit, he was to be inducted into the *Order of the Legion D'Honneur* for his services to France in the Second World War. The ceremony was held at the Chateau de Bernaville near Sainte Mere-Eglise. Unknown to him, the National World War II Museum had arranged for his daughter Kim and his grandchildren Jessica and Tyler to surprise him there.

Afterwards they visited some of the beaches and memorials. He collected sand from Utah Beach to later place in vials for his grandchildren, with a letter explaining its significance. He becomes concerned about the passage of time and passing the torch of accuracy from the original wartime generation, onward. That is where he stresses the importance of the National World War II Museum's work.

PASSING THE TORCH


Now, Mr. D. is stepping back from directorships that are not part of his own companies, but he maintains an office for life at Arlington International Racecourse, the miracle that he led out of the ashes.

This spring, members of his family will again travel to France for the 75th Anniversary of D-Day on June 6. There are few left that can share his memories of that time. By doing so, he reminds us all of the vigilance needed to



Temporary stands were built for the Miracle Million in 1985.

maintain freedom and democracy. His quiet wisdom is inspiring. Whatever your walk in life, strive for courtesy and respect for those around you, honesty in your dealings, and pride in what you do. This is his life's theme, together with an imbued self-discipline, gained he is convinced, in those formative years at Morgan Park Military Academy, where except for the year that he went to France, he has regularly attended their Commencement Exercises. Morgan Park has an award named for him, the Richard L. Duchossois '40 Integrity and Values Alumni Award. It is given annually in recognition of its namesake's "lifetime achievements, outstanding professional success, and service to the Academy, his community, and society".

And, after sharing some time with this remarkable human being, must be added, his optimism and indomitable spirit. 

Special thanks to Kim Duchossois, Jessica Green, Annette Jackson, and Meg Cahill of The National WWII Museum, for their support. Photography from "Riding the Rails" is courtesy of the Duchossois Family.



Junior Rafael Alvarado drove Richard Duchossois' Éclair de Lune in to win the 2010 Beverly D Grade 1 race, an achievement that he declared was better than winning the Kentucky Derby.

PHOTO: LINDA M. BARRETT



Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with out history since she first arrived in 1980.