My story is probably very similar to those of many of the fine people in the sport of harness racing.

I have been a lifelong fan who grew up going to the races with my buddies at Lebanon Raceway and Scioto Downs. Twenty-five years later, I still actively follow the sport by subscribing to all the magazines, watching the races on TVG, and catching the replays from the Meadowlands. I still go to the races, but not as often as I would like.

I have many fond memories of the sport. I can still vividly remember Life Sign being parked the mile and winning the Little Brown Jug in the greatest race of all time. Jug day is my favorite day of the year, but this year something changed: I got the itch and this year I decided to take the leap and go from super-fan to owner.

What a journey it has been.

My buddies and I finally decided to pool some money together to get a claimer. First, let me say it is not an easy process. Finding a good trainer, understanding the rules, the paperwork for the USTA, licensing for each state, the fingerprinting, setting up the LLC, opening the bank account—and that is just so we can find a horse to claim. It was a learning experience, and I see why more people just don't jump into the sport.

There really should be a one-page instruction sheet to assist us rookies. They say learning is not cheap, and while I was waiting for my buddies to get their paperwork together I got really rich and somehow talked my wife into letting me claim a mare on my own. I got the claim at Pocono Downs and was super excited. JK Reunited was only 5 years old, with a 1:50.4 record, and she cost only $24,000. What a bargain!

I am sure you know where this is going. When we brought her home we found out she had a suspensory tear, and now I am learning all about breeding. Fun!

Even though the journey to the winner's circle was challenging, that day... will absolutely be a memory of a lifetime.

After 45 days my buddies and I were finally licensed and ready to go. The LLC was set up and we were ready to make our first claim. We claimed a 5-year-old gelding called Smart Nukes. I have been following the horse and felt it has some upside, and I am happy to report that Smart Nukes won in his first race for Roma V Racing LLC on May 7, 2010, at Harrah's Chester.

Even though the journey to the winner's circle was challenging, that day, just like Life Sign's win, will absolutely be a memory of a lifetime.

I appreciate all of the help and support of Virgil Morgan Jr. I have to be one of the most hands-on rookie owners in the sport, and he did a great job of helping us with the process and being patient. Also, great drive by Tim Tetrick going from last to first in the final quarter. That is something I will never forget.

Oh, I almost forgot—anybody looking for a well-bred yearling?

Carl Howard is president and CEO of Fazoli’s Restaurants. He reclaimed Smart Nukes and now has three horses racing. The views contained in this column are that of the author alone, and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of the United States Trotting Association. To comment on this article, e-mail us at readerforum@ustrotting.com.