

Writing 18-21 Champion
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Finally left to myself, I could no longer restrain the grief that had built up inside of me during the course of Fancy's infirmity. My sobs pierced the silence of the freezing January night; my tears soaked the thick winter fur of my mare as I buried my face into her mane. Racked with despair, I clung to my beloved horse as the cold dark enveloped the little barn. Although Fancy was aged in years, she had never aged in spirit, and this resiliency of spirit had assured me that the dreaded day of death was an event of the distant and vague future. I was unprepared to face the possibility that I might lose her.

Fancy had injured her gaskin, and the injury made it difficult and painful for her to move, and nearly impossible for her to get up. The record-breaking temperatures of 20 below zero hadn't helped matters- lying in the snow and unable to rise, Fancy had become chilled. We covered her with blankets, administered bute, and applied liniment and massage to the injured area. Now, huddled near her side as she lay in her stall, I fervently prayed that the spirit that had sustained my 28 year old Half Arabian mare thus far might carry her through the ordeal that we now faced.

Fancy has been renowned for her spirit ever since that day in 1978 that she first became a part of our family. My grandma was looking for an ideal first horse for my aunt, firmly decided that she wouldn't care how ugly the horse was so long as it was quiet and well-trained. All those resolutions melted away, however, when she first laid eyes upon a gorgeous, unbroken, and spirited palomino filly. Unable to resist, my grandma purchased the beautiful Fancy.

Fancy was the first horse I ever knew. Indeed, I am indebted to her for my love of horses. One of my earliest memories consists of walking down my grandparents' driveway to Fancy's pasture and feeding her handfuls of grass through the fence. The softness of her muzzle as she took the grass from my hand, the brightness of her expressive eyes, the gleam of southern California sun on her golden coat- all of these elements combined to instill in me a love for these wondrous creatures. But most of all, I loved Fancy.

I became separated from my Fancy when we moved to northern Idaho. When my parents told me that Fancy was to be "shipped" to live with us, I was ecstatic. My 6 year old understanding of this led me to believe that Fancy would come to us on an Atlantic steamer, much like the one that Shataan of the movie *The Black Stallion* embarked upon. In my mind, Fancy was equal in standing to the famed Black Stallion. My perception was not too far off; after having spent the last few years in a pasture with little riding, Fancy's spirit and energies rivaled those of any Black Stallion.

Although her liveliness was at times challenging for a beginning equestrian, she made me a better rider in the end. As we grew in trust and friendship, I learned to depend upon her, and she to depend on me. Horse shows, 4-H, and trail riding soon became a part of our lives. And ever still, Fancy's spirit was a constant component of her nature. In equitation classes, we would have circled the arena several times by the time the other horses had gotten around once; Fancy with her neck arched and prancing in her animated gait, while the other horses barely moved with their noses dragging the ground. More than once I was asked if Fancy was a green youngster, and more than once the questioner was surprised to learn that Fancy was in her 20's.

Fancy's spirit and heart surpass those of many horses half her age. Even as she aged and we retired from the show ring, her lust for life never waned. Her pluck and resilience carried her onward even when her back began to sway and her golden coat to whiten. The crippling effects of arthritis could never cripple her spirit. If ever there was any horse testament to the spirit and endurance of the Arabian breed, it is her.

It is now spring. Sunshine, flora, and fauna have returned, transforming the barren landscape of winter into a springtime palette of pastels. But far more meaningful to me than the return of the birds or flowers is the restoration of my Fancy to me. Once again, we ride along wooded trails, the sun warm upon our backs. Fancy prances as of old, champing at the bit, begging to be let loose for a run. Gladly, I consent. The spirit that made her well now revives her arthritic joints with new vigor, and we fly through the forest. Borne by the endemic spirit of the Arabian, all of the worries and cares of winter are blown away by the wind, and Fancy gallops on- exuberant, youthful, spirited.