

## **The Story of My Gift**

When I first read this year's "Creative Contest" topic, The Gift, I knew it was going to be a tough topic to write about. But then, a few days ago, it came to me: Who was the horse, the gift that affected my life in more ways than is possibly imaginable? I will tell you, but first I must start at the beginning; I'm going to tell you a story about a horse, or rather, a little girl's love for her horse.

I was probably nine or ten when we first looked at her. We had just gone through the traumatizing experience many people go through, putting a horse to sleep. Going in, I wasn't expecting much, I know, after having looked at so many potential horses so far. Sydney was small, maybe 14.2, 14.3 at best. She wasn't young either, probably 14. She was very fuzzy after having just come out of a typical, cold Iowa winter. As I'm sure you know, it is the dream of every young girl to have a pretty white pony, so I quickly fell for her. She was grade, but it was obvious she had the best of the Arabian traits in her. It didn't take long; sold.

We had her stabled at a farm near our city home, and she was wonderful; she was the queen and I was the princess. I had the time of my life with that little mare; she was my riding instructor. I would take her in the round pen, through the woods, over the creek, everywhere I possibly could. Bareback? No big deal; she taught me balance, control, and a good, natural seat. She taught me everything.

But I tell you, that mare had the funniest quirks, for example, she would avoid stepping in other horses' manure at all costs. It made me laugh the way she would sidestep back and forth between piles. She taught me many lessons: I remember one time in particular. I was practicing balance bareback at the lope and had been constantly practicing it in the direction of the barn (which, as we all know, makes horses a little more willing...) and decided to try it the opposite direction. So we were cantering along, when all of a sudden, her weight went forward and her heels cocked up, barely leaving the ground. But I'm sure

you can imagine how that played out for me. I flew over that little mare's head like lightning. Sydney hadn't done it to be mean, she'd done it to show me she could, and that's why I loved her. She had that "attitude", that aura about her that made everyone, human and horse, watch. I was a little shocked but crawled back on her and headed home. I had learned my lesson: ride in a saddle.

I remember another thing and hopefully it will show you what a wise horse Sydney really was. We were riding along, my mother on her little gelding and I on Syd; we were trotting along the side of a neighboring pasture, I in front, and I glanced down, for no reason in particular, and right in front of Sydney was laying a part of the barbed wire fence! I wouldn't have time to stop her because her hoof was practically upon it, but good ole' Syd saw it and knew that it wasn't good, and slipped around it.

We eventually figured out that she was a cross between an Arabian and Paint. I use to tell everyone she was my "horse of many colors" because she was normally a flea-bitten gray but when she was being bathed or was sweaty, her coat would turn to gray and white. Sydney had a little white mark on her nose, so we would have to put sunscreen on it during the summer. One thing she always did after we put it on was she would sneeze all over us! We began to learn to expect it.

Well, I had better stop before I get going. I just thought I ought to share with you the story of my "gift". Sydney died two years ago; due to colic. She was tough through the whole thing, which wasn't exactly helpful. She showed none of the usual symptoms: she didn't roll and she didn't throw her head at her sides. We took her to the vet, but were too late. I was devastated, refusing to speak that whole day. And I cried. I remember lying in my room, by myself, crying. It was horrible, and I shiver at the thought of the pain of that awful day. What made it harder, though, was that she was pregnant. Not very far into her gestation, but still, she was pregnant. We had her bred because we saw her watching

the mares and their foals in the pasture; she wanted a baby. That's why it was so hard for me, knowing she had never experienced the joy of having a little foal of her own. It got easier, however. Now Sydney even has her own corner in my room where I have and collect various white horse things in her honor: models, paintings, a few locks of her mane, photos of us together, etc. Her memory will forever live in the hearts of many people, including myself and my family.

-Danielle Gallet

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