



August Writing Prompt Winner

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When I was young, our herd ran with the wind and danced with the grasses. We fed on the thick prairie grass and the occasional sweet wild apple. We raced across the prairie, a colorful band of browns, whites, blacks, and the rarity of spots or patches. I was a young colt, barely a year old, but I was handsome. I was one of those rarities. I was gleaming black from my head to my flank, but a bright white snowcap blanket completely covered my loin, croup, and hip. Yes, young one, I know it is hard to believe now that I am all white from old age, but it is true.

I was also considered an oddity because of my unusual gaits. Instead of the typical walk, trot, lope, gallop, I possessed some unique gaits. I was what is considered now as a gaited horse. Instead, my gaits were walk, rack, pace, lope, and gallop. In my later years, I would be considered the most athletic and talented horse in the world. I would be ridden mainly by small children who still needed to get the feel of riding. This would be because of my exceptionally smooth "trot." But let us return to the tale of my early days. My first three years, life was mainly monotonous: finding new grazing grounds and playing with my fellow foals. Those were the good days. Enjoy them while you can, young one; they don't last long.

In my fourth year, my friends and I were disrupted from our horseplay by the rumbling of many hooves and a loud whooping. As the vast, noisy dust cloud approached, we could vaguely make out shapes. As we had suspected, it was a herd of horses, but gruff and noisy humans were on their backs. With other humans, these riders were famous; they were known as cowboys. To us horses, they were



known as doom, destruction, death, and despair. We bolted as far and fast as we could, but the cowboys caught up to us. We were entangled in their ropes, which stopped us short. We tried to escape our bonds, but the ropes were thick and strong. I heard a shout from one of our captors, "Hey Wyatt, looks like we got some nice saddle horses here. Looks to me they can't be over five's my guess!" "And look at that fella over there, a mighty nice chunk of horseflesh we wrangled up there." Another cowboy shouted, pointing at me. "Real purdy too." came a woman's voice. Obviously, she was trying to talk like the Cowboys did. The cowboys started laughing, "Oh, hear Li'l Lucy over there talkin' like the boys. That's real funny, that is!" Lucy harrumphed and scowled.

We were dragged away from our home and across the prairie to who knew where. Eventually, we spotted our destination: a large corral, eight feet high. Wall tents surrounded this massive prison, obviously the cowboy & cowgirl housing. The Cowboys dragged us into the corral, each of us pulled by two strong Quarter Horses.

The gate was closed, and we were left there for the night.

We were met that morning by a barrage of cowboys, two or three cowgirls, and a whole lot of ropes. Lucy, as she was called, got first pick. "Ladies first." At least the wild horsemen had some manners. Lucy leaped off the fence, laid the rope halter she carried about my face, and tightened it to fit. The cowboys sighed sadly. After reading their faces, I figured they all wanted the flashy colt with the blanket. Lucy tugged on the lead, and I followed. Anything to please her. She wasn't mean or gruff, and she didn't seem threatening. She was a whole lot better than those howling cowboys who reminded me of wolves. Lucy was kind and coaxing



while she trained me. She gave me sweet treats whenever I did something good. I soon began to try as hard as I could to please her. She was pleased with my training and began to work on getting me to accept the bit and saddle, and to let me allow her on my back.

No problem there! She urged me to move forward, and I moved forward. She squealed with happiness, and I jumped! "Oops! Sorry buddy!" she said. No problem! I thought happily. Soon Lucy was riding me like a seasoned horse. The cowboys glared at her from their seats in the dirt where their mounts had left them.

Lucy decided we no longer belonged at this dust pit. We packed out of the campsite with her string of horses. Our journey lasted a week. I didn't know where we were headed, but Lucy obviously knew. At the end of the week, I was pleased that we arrived at a large ranch that looked comfortable and inviting. Lucy tied me at a hitching post and unsaddled me. She led me to a corral with the rest of her remuda. There was hay, oats, and cool fresh water. While I was there, I met many more of her horses. Lola, in particular, was my role model. It was she who told me that this was a dude ranch. She was an old mare of 26 so I assumed she knew what she was talking about. That week, I entered my career as a dude horse. Dudes are city slickers who come to ranches to learn more about the western way of life and to ride horses. For several months Lucy was the only one to ride me but soon I was under the guests. My favorite was a girl of around twelve who was just like Lucy. Later on, I found that her name was Casey, and she was Lucy's daughter. Sounds like good horsemanship runs in the family.



On average, my riders were in the range of six to thirteen years old.

Some were good riders; some were absolutely horrible. Even so, my career was quite enjoyable. When I turned nineteen, I was given to Casey as a birthday present. That was the year she turned fifteen. She was an exceptionally talented rider, and I enjoyed our rides together. At 28, I was retired. Now you see me, 36 years old, still going strong. Though I may be eating beet pulp and alfalfa pellets soaked as my sole feed and only Lucy's grandkids ride me at a walk for fifteen minutes bareback, I am as healthy as a grasshopper in a manicured lawn.

Lucy and Casey visit me often, usually with a child or grandchild on each hip, but our private visits are the best. They bring me sugar cubes, some apple sauce, the occasional pureed carrot, and talk soothingly. I, my child, am not boasting, but I am the luckiest horse in the world. You hear of those horses in barns with marble feeders and waterers, but do they have the fresh air of the West about them? Do they have little children climbing all over them, and do they have little girls to give them kisses on the nose? The answer is no. That, dear one, is the end of my story: one of freedom, adventure, excitement, and, most importantly, love.