

t o u c h e d b y a

# Horse

melisa pearce

If there is one core value or expression of emotion that is central to our relationship with horses, it is that of gratitude. Those that share their world with horses have a perspective in their everyday consciousness that is a true gift. It leads to feeling blessed for having these wonderful animals in our lives. Over my lifetime, I have been fortunate to have owned, shown, bred, and raised several incredible horses. Many of them have been my dearest friends, my most profound teachers, and my most trusted confidants.

As a child from a non-horse family, I learned to ride on horses from rental stables in a time when there was no wrangler present and the only instruction given was to not bring them back "hot." Without those horses' protection, I might never have lived through those years. Later, when I was eleven, and given my first horse, I often tried out new things I bought at the local tack store or new ideas I had read in equine magazines. Learning without an instructor or trainer meant that experimenting was the main path. My little mare's patience was remarkable.

A year later, I learned about breaking up and had to say goodbye to my beloved friend. She was sold because owning one horse was our family limit, and so she left to make room for my next mount. We found a wonderful home for her with a family who treasured her for the rest of her days.

As a young teen, with a deeply troubled home life, my new gelding quickly became my best friend. He was always there and happy to see me; never too busy to listen or telling me that my concerns had no merit. He easily received the tears I wept into his mane with my arms wrapped around his warm neck. Something about that sweaty horses' scent brings, to this day, a feeling



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of appreciation and gratitude for their immense capacity to love.

My teen life was at the barn with my friends and the horses we rode gave us a desired sense of freedom and adventure. Too young to date or even to drive, we were more mobile than our peers. The social stratum in which I was raised looked upon owning a horse as a luxury, not an assumed thing. We were aware that our parents were allowing us to have this luxury as long as we appreciated it as such. There were many times that our horses were the deciding factor in being able to withstand the peer pressure of other teens; we knew if we broke the rules, we would be "grounded" away from the barn and the risk was too great. The horses won out every time.

Years later, as a young mom, I witnessed horses becoming the most gentle of giants with my son, Cody. They would take a softer step, make a slower movement, and create a smoother turn;

all the while instilling self-confidence in the rider on their backs.

Illness, loss, and death are a large part of real life. In general, kids seem to be sheltered from these things, but my friends and I understood injury, death, and grief through our horses. These were painful lessons; ones which prepared us for the hard times throughout life.

When my daughter Molly was born, she was diagnosed as having a life-threatening chronic illness. She endured multiple surgeries and for seventeen years has lived an unpredictable existence. It was the horse community that showed up to help us through that time. Not afraid of work, tears, or emotions, my horse pals have always been there. My daughter has survived and as things become more secure in her life, the horses have given her a loving and wonderful outlet for healing and her own accomplishments.

Several broodmares and a World Champion Stallion later, I realized my childhood dreams and goals by becoming a breeder, always aware of the miracle of birth and life and appreciation for all that is important in our lives. My pursuits in showing have led me on a different path of Western Pleasure and Reining into jumping which is even more captivating and exhilarating.

Over the years I have come to believe that life is full of unchosen circumstances and that being human has to do with our responses to all that we endure. Those choices are what we determine to be our truths. Horses are wonderful teachers of being in the present moment and experiencing one of the greatest human values, gratitude. Blessed are those of us whose horses touch our souls. **H**