



Wildwood Farm CLIPS & CLOPS Oak Harbor

December 2023

YOUR NEIGH-BORHOOD HULLABALOO

CREATED & EDITED BY HEATHER CARDER

Sweethearts of the Rodeo

By Lydia Peelle June 2006

Lately I've been thinking about that summer. We barely ever got off those ponies' backs. We painted war paint across their foreheads and pinned wild-turkey feathers in our hair and whooped and raced across the back field, hanging on to their necks. Some days they were a pair of bucking broncos, or unicorns, or circus horses, or burros on a narrow mountain pass. Other days they were as delicate and regal as the rich ladies' horses, and we were two queens, veiled sultanas crossing the Sahara under a burning sky. We were the kidnapped maidens, or the masked heroes. We braided flowers in their matted tails, dandelions and oxeye daisies that got lost in the snarls, wilted, and turned brown. We tore across the back field, our heels digging into their sides. We pulled them up short and did somersaults off their backs, or handstands in the saddle. We turned on a dime. We jumped the coop, the wall, the ditch. We were fearless. It was the summer we smoked our first cigarettes, the summer you broke your arm. It was the last summer, the last one, before boys.

Our mothers drop us off every morning at seven. We grab two pitchforks and fly through our chores. For four dollars an hour we shovel loads of manure and wet shavings out of the stalls, scrub the water buckets, and fill the hay racks, the hay sticking to our wet T-shirts, falling into our shoes, our pockets, our hair. We race to see who can get done first. The sooner we finish, the sooner we can ride. Late in the morning Curt comes out to the barn and leans against the massive sliding door. He wears sandals and baggy shorts, and under his thick, dark lashes his eyes are rimmed with red. He tells us what other jobs there are to be done: picking stones out of the riding ring, or refilling the water troughs in the pasture with the long, heavy hose. We whine and stamp our feet. He is the caretaker, after all, and supposed to do these tasks himself. *We were just about to go riding, we say. Girls, he says, winking, come on now.*

Some mornings he stays in his little house and doesn't come out until later, when the ladies' expensive cars start to pull into the long driveway. They get out and lean against their shiny hoods, smoking cigarettes and talking to Curt in low voices. Sometimes only one or two of them show up, and other times they all come, a half dozen of them in the

identical beige breeches and high boots that we dream of one day wearing. They never once get a streak of manure across their foreheads or water sloshed across their shirts. We turn down the volume of the paint-splattered barn radio to try to hear what they're saying, but we can't make it out. In the afternoon we eat the sandwiches our mothers packed for us and throw our apple cores over the fence to the ponies, who chew them carefully and sigh in the hot midday sun.

The ladies' horses all have brass plates on their stall doors, their names etched in fancy script, with their sires and dams in parentheses underneath. They are called "Curator," "Excelsior," "Hadrian." The ponies' names change daily, depending on our game. They don't even have stalls, but live out in the field, where they eat all day under a cloud of flies. Nobody even remembers who they belong to. For the summer, they are ours. They are round and close to the ground, wheezy and spoiled, with bad habits. One is brown and dulled by dust. The other is a pinto, bay with white splashes, one eye blue, the other brown. The blue eye is blind. We sneak up on this side when we go out to the pasture to catch them, a green halter hidden behind your back, a red one behind mine. The ponies allow us to get just

Continued on page 11

WHAT'S TRENDING NOW

HIT ACTIVE-CLEANER

Stable Robot...the future drives through you stable!

Apple picking... Strenuous, time-consuming and expensive. That's over now! The new HIT active barn robot ACTIVE CLEANER cleans runs and paddocks fully and automatically. Guided by cameras and intelligent software, the ACTIVE CLEANER selectively controls and collects the piles of apples.

The loading capacity is up to three piles. The horses get used to the new "group member" very quickly. The ACITVE CLEANER safely avoids horses standing in the way. After collecting the piles of apples, the ACTIVE CLEANER unloads its load at the manure pile or deposit location and starts its collection tour again.

The observation of the area to be cleaned is carried out by cameras. The ACTIVE CLEANER finds its optimal collection route through machine learning and artificial intelligence. To enable the cameras to detect the exact position of the ACTIVE CLEANER, it has integrated detection points in the cover. The ACTIVE CLEANER can be controlled and monitored via mobile phone, tablet or PC.



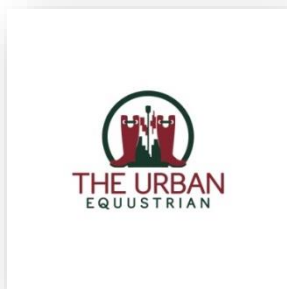
TECHNICAL DATA OF HIT ACTIVE-CLEANER

- Field of application: Manure collection robot for horse runs and paddocks
- Area performance: approx.. 1,500 sqm (depending on manure and distance to the unloading point)
- Dimensions: 125 x 75 x 43 cm
- Weight: 75 kg
- Loading volume: max. 3 piles
- Travel speed: variable, max. 13 m/min
- Propulsion: 2 wheel hub motors
- Battery: 1 x 24V 30Ah lithium ion battery
- Charging station: intelligent, drive-in charging station for consumption-optimized charging cycles
- Gradient: max. 25%
- Unloading area: flat ground conditions
- Operation: via mobile phone, tablet or PC
- Cameras: 24V power supply; Area coverage 50 to 100 sqm per camera

www.aktivstall.de

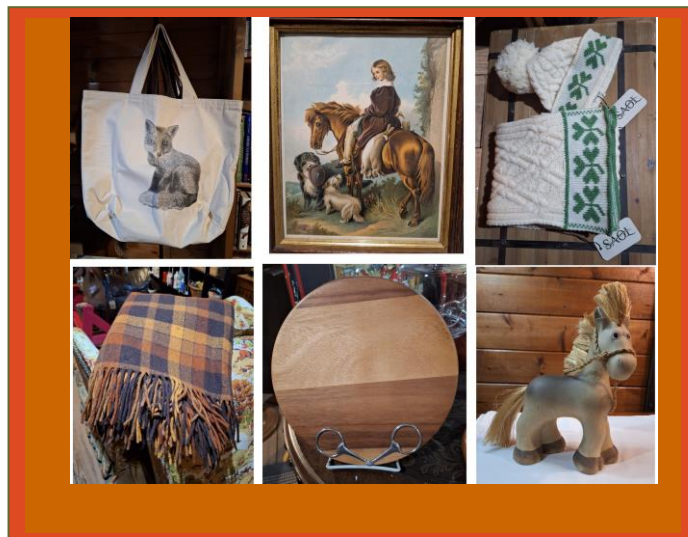


Our Store is currently open by Appointment



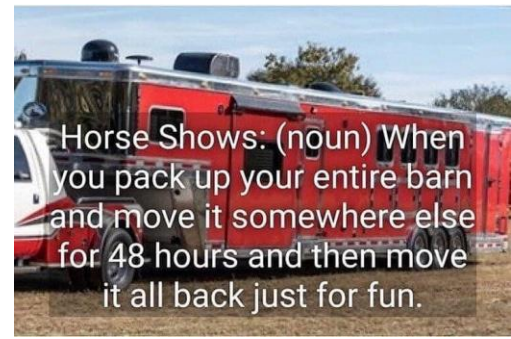
Shop Online!
www.thenoblehorsevintage.com

New Items for December



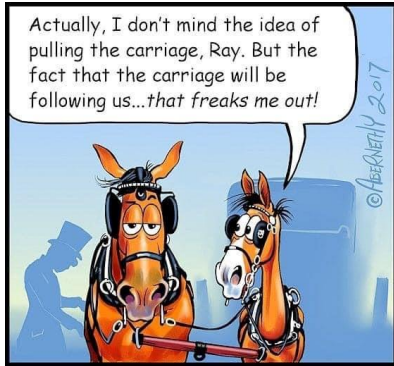


I worked my horse today!
Well, I lunged it.
... free lunging.
Free lunged in the paddock
for 1/2 an hour.
... ok, so I couldn't catch him.



Horse Shows: (noun) When you pack up your entire barn and move it somewhere else for 48 hours and then move it all back just for fun.

PERSON: OMG!!! MY HORSE LOOKS JUST LIKE YOURS!!!



Person: omg you have a horse? they seem like the most beautiful & graceful animals

Me:



♥ There's one in every crowd ♥



MY HORSE

THEIR HORSE

Matt Streicher
1 Jul · 🌐
Behind every horse girl, is a non horsey guy who had no idea what he was getting himself into 😂



Had a bad day?
Life getting you down a bit?
Take a look at my 4yr olds picture of a horse.
You're welcome.



WHEN YOU MAKE THE PERFECT PILE



THEN YOU MEET THE MAT CRACK

WILDWOOD FARM B&B



This is your moment.

Today at Wildwood Farm B&B

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You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.

Immerse yourself in the equestrian world at Wildwood Farm B&B located on beautiful Whidbey Island.

Our ranch has a long history of igniting the spark between horses and humans, whether you want a small introduction or total immersion.

Come experience the power of possibility with these magnificent creatures and explore the abundance of silent repose.

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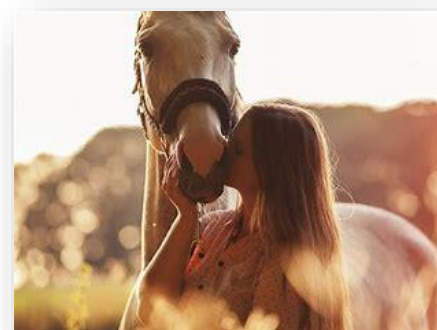
WILDWOOD FARM HAS IT ALL!

PACIFIC NORTHWEST
PNWA
Riding Academy



"Your horse is a mirror to your soul. Sometimes you might not like what you see. Sometimes you will."

-Buck Brannaman



"I smile when I catch God watching me through the eyes of a horse."

-Kevin Weatherby



WWW.PNWRiding.com

PACIFIC NORTHWEST
RIDING ACADEMY

Animals

By Virginia Mudd Madden

AS A CHILD — until the age of 29 — I put more trust in my animal friends than I did most People. Long ago, this made very good sense: my mother was cold, distant, and formal, my father was loving, but unsure of how to express his affection. I got little from either. I was the youngest of 5 children and my older brothers and sister were usually away, playing with their own friends or attending boarding school. I was alone.

I filled my private world with an ark of wonderful creatures: stuffed animals (there was “Puppy,” “Cocky,” “Peter Rabbit,” to name a few), my part-human, snow-white miniature Poodle, romping, dumb, lovable Labradors, and horses . . . horses . . . horses. I gave each animal at least one name, and the unlimited wealth of my affection, which was received gratefully most of the time, sometimes only tolerantly. They were of great comfort to me: the soothing warmth of the black lab’s well-muscled body, the softness of “Happy’s” curly white fur coat, the sweet apple-breath of my horse, “Blaze.”

I spent moments and whole summers in my intimate animal world, the happiest and saddest of my life. In the lifetime I spent observing and talking with my animal friends, I developed a keen and sympathetic understanding of them, their wants, needs and moods. I could anticipate the surge from a trot to a gallop before it happened and pull lightly on the reins, or admonish my horse in a soft voice, so there would be no hint of a broken rhythm. “Blaze” and I had such a close understanding of each other that in time the hackamore that he wore was more for form and adornment than for control. *He* knew where my favorite galloping places were and would automatically pick up speed as we approached those stretches. *I* knew that he liked to stop at the top of the hill, to catch his breath and look down on the valley below, to satisfy himself that all was right in the world. And on the way home, we both knew that it was all right for him to slip out of his regimented back-to-the-barn walk and into a brisk, eager, five-gaited walk that put us both in soaring spirits — and got him back to the barn a little faster.

I can watch animals going about their daily business for hours on end. Chickens captivate me: the way they seek out little grubs with such fierce determination, the way they luxuriate in their dirt baths, fluffing the dirt up all around them, snuggling happily with the warm Earth, shaking themselves off in a billowing dust storm, how they pick resolutely at their lice, how they race each other, wild-eyed and gleeful, across my lawn with a childish enthusiasm that you wouldn’t think possible in a dumb chicken. They fill my life with happy pecking, a sense of peace that I wouldn’t want to live without.

When I was 18, my husband-to-be and I drove across the country with “Eugene,” our pet rabbit, in a Lotus sports car. Each rabbit or squirrel or woods kitty we passed that lay run-over and dead on the side of the road caused me long periods of grieving and depression, as if I’d just lost a dear friend. To this day, lost, homeless dogs, especially those wandering up freeway on-ramps, give me a pain so deep in my heart that I feel as though I am the one who has been abandoned, cast off to make my own way in a cruel world that I’m nowhere near ready to cope with.

The animals never quite fulfilled the need for human warmth and affection, but they were a good substitute. I could always cuddle a large horse head in my lap, stroke and kiss the soft pink of that nose, lose myself in the depth of those gentle, loving black eyes. There was always a dog around who could be enlisted to listen to my woes, to catch a few tears in a thick coat of hair, to listen sympathetically, even if bewildered, to my sobs.

But I’ve begun to see the too-large place these wonderful creatures have taken in my life, that no chicken will be able to give me what my mother couldn’t, no horse will be my father. And maybe, if I screw up my courage, I can put some of that trust in People, to share with those two-legged creatures the infinite store of love I have, to trust them to love me and give to me in return. I just hope “Cocky” and “Puppy” won’t mind if I give them a smaller corner of my bed.

Nutrition Corner

CARROTS – THE PERFECT TREAT

Carrots are a perfect treat for horses. They're nutritional, and offer your horse a nice change from their normal feed. They should always be fed as a treat though, to avoid upsetting your horse's stomach. You can also consider other fruits and vegetables like apples, bananas, pumpkin, and strawberries as other great horse treats. Let's dive into all these details!

Carrots are very healthy for horses! Carrots have vitamin C and vitamin A, both antioxidants that support the immune system. One large carrot contains approximately 3.41 grams of sugar and about 7 carbohydrates as well as 2 grams of fiber.

Since they are low in sugar and carbohydrates, carrots are healthy for most horses. Fiber is essential in helping horses maintain a healthy digestive system. Carrots are full of nutrients that are all beneficial to the health of most horses. Like Oranges, which are also safe for horses, carrots make a great treat. Remember: If you feed in moderation (~2 large carrots/day), the sugar content of a carrot will never meaningfully affect your horse's system.

The average carrot has 41 Kcals and offers additional sources of calcium, iron, fat and protein – in addition to Vitamin C and Vitamin A.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF FEEDING CARROTS TO HORSES:

Feed them a carrot just the way it is, letting the horse bite off one piece at a time.

Chop up carrots and toss them in your horse's food trough or on top of their hay.

Bake your own homemade treats for your horses and add chopped-up carrots to the mix as an added treat.

Mix them into your horse's bran mash as a treat (alone or with other vegetables).

Use a cheese grater and shred up the carrots into tiny pieces to add to various treat mixtures.

Find ways to use them as behavioral enrichment by incorporating into toys or hiding them around the paddock.

Freeze chopped-up carrots for your horses. *The key is to make sure they are small enough that a horse will not accidentally choke if they swallow them whole.*

WILDWOOD FARM AND TRIPLE CROWN FEEDS.

Our partnership with Triple Crown began in 2014 through a promotion with the USEF encouraging farm members to compare their current feeding programs with Triple Crown products. We have found the TC products to be superior over other products primarily because of the EquiMix technology and the research support of a leading edge team including independent representatives of Equine Universities, Medical clinics and top level riders and trainers

Meet WF ROSALINA'S GOLD

In the spring of 2010, the year that the DesFountain's joined us at Wildwood Farm, a pretty little Arabian mare named OFW Mahogany Rose came to live with us, very pregnant, bred to a full Arabian stallion.

Unfortunately her foal only lived a short hour or so for undetermined reasons (only mother nature knows sometimes), but she was such a beautiful mare and could not successfully compete in the show ring due to a hock injury, so we adopted her and decided to breed her the following year to the Thoroughbred stallion, Private Gold, that Wildwood Farm owns a share of. Anglo-Arabians have always been a very sporty horse, and this breed was becoming sought after once again for the dressage and eventing disciplines.

In May of 2012 Rosie foaled a stunning little bay filly that we named Juliette. She reminded us of a little ballerina, with delicate features and slender legs, lovely arched neck and large, deep eyes.



Rosie, her mother, was not as thrilled with Juliette as we were. At first she was enamored, but after about a month she was already tiring of the task of motherhood. She was a militant mother, meaning that she did not show Juliette any affection and only allowed her to nurse on her terms, when her bag was full or when she was done eating. Juliette stayed obediently in the corner, not wanting to bear her mother's rath if she stepped out of line.

Thankfully, she had other brood mares in the field that took her under wing and showed her the affection she needed, and she grew into a lovely little 2 year old with very good manners and extremely respectful (one good thing about Rosie!).

When Juliette was two she was sold as an Eventing prospect to a breeder in Virginia, and last we heard in 2019 Juliette was in North Carolina competing at preliminary level with many wins and placings.

WHAT'S YOUR Derby horse name?

If your first name starts with:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| A D.J. | N The Greatest |
| B F. Scott's | O Saucy Queen |
| C Flight O' | P Tiny Trifecta |
| D Long Tall | Q Winston Von |
| E Stonewashed | R Grande |
| F Firecracker's | S Fascinating |
| G Jumpin' Jack | T Horsey Mc |
| H You Can't Handle | U Honest Abe's |
| I Make America | V Squeaky |
| J Vladimir's | W Fifty Shades of |
| K Papa John's | X Good Girl |
| L JLaw's | Y Bashful |
| M Colonel's | Z Cantankerous |

And you were born on:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Long Face | 16 Royal Baby |
| 2 Jazzibelle | 17 Romper |
| 3 Money Grabber | 18 Hot Brown |
| 4 Sassy Pants | 19 Rose All Day |
| 5 Derby Hat | 20 Fidget Spinner |
| 6 Hot Chicken | 21 Bitcoin |
| 7 Black Panther | 22 Vlogger |
| 8 Coach 2 | 23 Rocketman |
| 9 Too Many Juleps | 24 Infield Cowboy |
| 10 Bluegrass State | 25 Snapchatter |
| 11 Snickerdoodle | 26 Macchiato |
| 12 Payday | 27 Thunderstorm |
| 13 Jerkface | 28 Road Tripper |
| 14 Dilly Dilly | 29 Netflix Binger |
| 15 Superfecta | 30 Bourbon Balls |
| | 31 Hugginkiss |

 USA TODAY SPORTS



CHRISTMAS HORSES!



Mr. Ed's Home

Los Angeles, California

A classic American barn that was the home of a classic American television star.



IF YOU'VE EVER WONDERED WHERE talking horses are found, this iconic red barn on Harvester farms (named after Mr. Ed's father) is the answer.

Quintessentially red and offset beautifully by green foliage in the foreground, is where Mr. Ed the Talking Horse (real name, Bamboo Harvester) lived after he came into this world in Reseda in 1949. Bamboo Harvester was named after his father, Harvester, as is tradition in equine breeding.

The barn is special not only because of its role in Mr. Ed's life, but because architecturally, it is one of few original redwood barns of its kind remaining in all of the Los Angeles area. It was built around the turn of the century and operated as a poultry farm, its many acres also housing cattle and horses. In the 1950s, the place became the Palomino Horse Association headquarters and Mr. Ed's father was used as a stud to create the pedigree. The current owner has been living in the neighboring house and maintaining the barn since the '80s. The barn is also being considered as a state landmark due to its historical significance. It is Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 645, designated in 1997.

The Harvester was foaled in 1938, a golden Palomino that sired over 100 registered Palominos. These horses were most successful in Trick, Reined, Western Pleasure and Parade competitions. In 1963 Harvester died in the barn. Harvester was the father of Mr. Ed – the talking horse, star of the 1961-66 TV series. Mr. Ed was foaled in 1949 in Reseda, before moving to Chatsworth around 1953.

The Tarpan



During the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, the North and South American Equus species went extinct, leaving their Eurasian cousins to propagate the breed. That's where the Tarpan, also known as *Equus ferus ferus*, comes in: it was this shaggy, ill-tempered horse that was domesticated by the early human settlers of Eurasia, leading directly to the modern horse. The breed was found in many parts of the world at one point. They lived in western Europe, North America, Russia, Spain, Poland, and parts of France to name a few places. Traces of them can be found from the Pleistocene to the modern age.

Two variations of the breed existed, which were the forest type and steppe type. The forest type was considerably shorter, standing only 50 inches (127 cm) at the withers, while the steppe type was built for running and stood 55-57 inches tall.

Surprisingly, the Tarpan managed to survive well into historical times; even after millennia of interbreeding with modern horses, a few pure-bred individuals roamed the plains of Eurasia as late as the early 20th century, the last one dying in captivity (in Russia) in 1909 and the last wild ones died roughly 1875 to 1890. In the early 1930's--perhaps inspired by other, less ethical eugenics experiments--German scientists attempted to re-breed the Tarpan, producing what is now known as the Heck Horse. The Heck horse was created by the German zoologist brothers Heinz Heck and Lutz Heck and although unsuccessful at creating a genetic copy of the extinct species, they developed a breed with grullo coloration and primitive markings. Heck horses were subsequently exported to the United States, where a breed association was created in the 1960s.

The name tarpan is derived from Turkish language, it means wild horse. Their appearance has been reconstructed from archaeological data. They were dun or gray in color with dorsal stripes. Some had striping on their shoulders, as well. The pictures shown above are of Heck Horses.

Cont'd from page 1

close enough, then toss their heads and trot away. Peppermints and buckets of grain don't fool them. After a while we decide just to leave their halters on. When we cinch up their girths, they twist their necks around to bite our arms, leaving bruises like sunset-colored moons. As the summer gets hotter, we stop bothering with saddles altogether and just clip two lead lines to their halters, grab a hank of mane, and vault on. We trot them through the field and down the hill to the pine woods, making them scramble up steep ridges. The ponies are much faster coming home than going. We get as far away as we can and then let them race home through the woods, spruce limbs and vines whipping our faces.

The ladies hardly ever ride. All day their horses stand out in the sun, their muscles like silk-covered stone. Sometimes they bring them into the barn and tie them up in the crossties, then wander into Curt's house and don't come out. The horses wait patiently for an hour or so, then begin to paw and weave their heads. They dance and swivel in the aisle, and still the ladies won't come out. Finally we unhook them from the ties and turn them out into the pasture, where they spin and kick out a leg before galloping back to the herd. When the ladies reappear in the doorway of the little house, late in the afternoon, they squint in the light as if emerging from a cave and don't ever seem to notice that their horses are not where they left them.

The ponies bear witness to dozens of pacts and promises that we make in the grave light of late afternoon and have every intention of keeping. We cross our hearts and hope to die on the subjects of horses, husbands, and each other. We dare one another to do dangerous things: You dare me to jump from the top of the manure pile, and I do, and land on my feet with manure in my shoes. I double-dare you to take the brown pony over the triple-oxer jump, which is higher than his ears. You ride hellbent toward it, but the pony stops dead, throwing you over his head, and you sail through the air and land laughing. We are covered in scrapes and bruises, splinters buried so deep in our palms that we don't remember they are there. Our bodies forgive us our risks, and the ponies do, too. We have perfected the art of falling.

There is one horse that was brought over on a plane, all the way from England. One afternoon we are sitting up in the hayloft, sucking peppermints and discussing all the horses we will own someday, when we hear a scream from below. The horse, left tied and standing in the aisle, has spooked and broken its halter and gashed its head open on a beam. Blood drips from its eyelashes and pools by its hooves, and it sways like a rope bridge. We grab saddle pads from the tack room, the ladies' expensive fleece ones, and press them to the wound. They grow hot and heavy with blood. It drips down our arms into our hair. The horse shakes its head and gnashes its teeth at us. We look over at the little house, all the blinds drawn tight. Who will knock on the door? We flip a coin. I don't remember whether you won or lost, but you are the one who cuts through the flower bed, stands on the step, and knocks and knocks, and after a long time Curt comes out in jeans and bare feet with no shirt. And then in the shadow of the doorway is the lady the horse belongs to, scowling, her blond hair half undone, looking at you as if she is having a hard time understanding why you're all covered in blood. After the vet comes and stitches up the wound, the lady eyes us suspiciously and whispers to Curt. Later he makes sure she is within earshot before scolding us. When the vet has left and they have gone back into the house, we knock down a paper-wasp nest and toss it through the open window of her car.

There is a pond in the back pasture where the horses go to drink, half hidden by willows and giant honeysuckle bushes that shade it from the noonday sun. On the hottest days we swim the ponies out to the middle, and when their hooves leave the silty bottom, it feels as if we are flying. The water is brown, and rafts of manure float past us as we swim, but we don't care. When we come out of the water, the insides of our thighs are streaked with wet horsehair, as if we were turning into wild beasts ourselves. The ponies shake violently to dry off, and we jump down as they drop to their knees to roll in the dust. Other days it is too hot to swim, or even move at all. We lie on the ponies' necks as they graze in the pasture, our arms hanging straight down. The heat drapes across our shoulders and thighs. School is as unthinkable as snow.

Rodeo is our favorite game, because it is the fastest and most reckless, involving many feats of speed and bravery, and lots of quick turns and trick riding. One day in late July, out in the back field, we decide to elect a rodeo clown and a rodeo queen. The ponies stamp impatiently while we argue over who will be which. Finally the games begin. There is barrel racing and a bucking bronco and a rodeo parade. We discover that we can make the ponies rear by pushing them forward with our heels while holding the reins tight. Yee haw! we say, throwing one arm up in the air. The ponies chew their bits nervously, and we do it over and over again. We must lean far forward on their necks, or we will slip off. Once, when the pinto pony goes up, you start to lose your balance. I am doubled over laughing until I see you grope for the reins as the pony goes higher, and you grab them with too much force and yank his head back too far. He hangs suspended for a moment before falling backward like a tree onto his spine. You disappear as he rolls to his side, then reappear when he scrambles to his feet, the reins dangling from the bit. I jump off my

WILDWOOD FARM Clips & Clops Newsletter

2326 Happy Valley Rd
Oak Harbor WA 98277

Pony and run to you. Your arm is broken from the looks of it. Oh, shit, I say. You squint up at me through a veil of blood. Doesn't hurt, you say.

Curt was the one who rescued you. He drove his pickup through the tall grass of the back pasture, lifted you onto the bench seat, made you a pillow with his shirt. And when no one could get ahold of your parents, it was he who drove you to the emergency room. I rode in the truck bed and watched through the rear window as you stretched your legs across his lap, your bare feet on his thighs. I could see his arms, your face, his freckled hand as he brushed the hair, or maybe tears, from your eyes. I sat across from him at the hospital and waited while they stitched the gash on your forehead and put your left arm in a cast, and I came in with him to check on you. I hung back in the corner when he leaned over the table, and I heard you whisper to him in a high, helpless voice. I watched your hand grope out from under the blanket, reaching for his. And I saw him hold it. With both hands. Of course I was jealous. I still am. You must have a scar to remind you of that summer. I have nothing I can point to, nothing I can touch.

It was early August when the brown pony died. It happened overnight, and no one knew how: whether he colicked and twisted a gut, or had a heart attack, or caught a hind foot in his halter while tending an itch and broke his own neck. When we found the body, we didn't cry. I remember we weren't even very sad. We went to find Curt, who lit a cigarette and instructed us not to tell the ladies. Then we went back and looked at the pony's still body, his velvety muzzle, his open eye, his lips pulled back from his big domino teeth. We touched his side, already cold. Later we rode the pinto pony double out to the pond, your arms around my waist, your cast knocking against my hipbone. Behind us the tractor coughed as Curt pulled the pony's body to the manure pile with heavy chains. We slipped off the pinto, let him wander away, and sprawled out in the grass, we lay there all afternoon and into the evening, your head on my stomach, our fingers in the clover, trying to think up games we could play with only one pony.

Weeks later we were alone in the barn. We were sweeping the long center aisle, shoving push brooms toward one another from opposite ends, the radio flickering on and off, like it always did. When it faded out completely, we heard the squabbling of dogs out back. We dropped our brooms and ran to see what they were fighting over. Through a cloud of dust we could make out Curt's dog, his back to us, bracing himself with his tail in the air and growling at one of the ladies' fierce little dogs, who was shaking his head violently, his eyes squeezed shut. Between them they had the brown pony's head. It took us a while to recognize it. It was mostly bone, yellow teeth, and gaping eye sockets, except for a few bits of brown hair that hung from the forehead, some cheek muscle and stringy tendon clinging to the left side. And then we saw it, both at the same time: the little scrap of green against the white. The pony still had its halter on. This was what the dogs had gotten their teeth around. Curt had never bothered to take it off. With a final shake of his jaws, the little dog managed to snatch the pony's head away, and he dragged it around the corner of the barn, Curt's dog bounding after.

Death was familiar to us that summer: it was on the road, in the woods, under the floor of the barn; it was the raccoon rotting on the pavement and the crows that settled there to pick at it until they, too, were flattened by cars, and their bodies swelled and stank in the heat; it was the half-decayed doe we found in the woods with maggots stitching in and out of its flesh; it was the stillborn foal wrapped in a decomposing amniotic sac in the pasture where the vultures perched. We caught a whiff of it, sniffed it out, didn't flinch, touched it with our bare hands, ate lunch immediately afterward. We weren't frightened of it.

And a few summers later, spinning out of control on a loose gravel road in a car full of boys and beer, we weren't scared of death then, either. We laughed and said to the boy at the wheel, *Do it again*. We learned to fear it only later, much later, when we realized that it knew our names, and, worse, the names of everything we loved. At the height of that summer, in the dog days, I would have said that we loved the ponies, but I see now that we never did. They were only everything we asked them to be, and that was enough.