



# Wildwood Farm CLIPS & CLOPS

Oak Harbor

APRIL 2026

YOUR NEIGH-BORHOOD HULLABALOO

CREATED & EDITED BY HEATHER CARDER

## UNRULY

By Erin Wood

At first I think the horse is dying. With Paul's hand on her forehead, she folds into the grass at his feet, her thousand pounds yielding to his 160. An unfiltered Pall Mall tilts in his mouth, burning almost to his chapped lips.

I'm seven and have just started riding, but even I know how unruly this horse is: Kicking her stall in the barn—*pow-pow-pow!*—like she wants out. Kicking at the other horses in the pasture like she wants them dead. Biting people like she hates them for loving her. But here she is folding. Paul's ash may fall on her, but it won't burn. Lying in the grass, she is saying, *I will*.

Paul's wife, Marsha, is teaching me to ride. They live in a ranch house by the barn, so they're right there to take care of the horses. At the start of each lesson Marsha greets me with her wide, toothy grin—so bright I can feel its warmth. She shows me how to shake a coffee can full of feed to call the herd in from the field. How to hop on bareback and ride to the barn if a horse won't come in for the feed. How, on days when the mud has dried hard,

to use the currycomb first and the brush second. How to scrape away botflies throughout the summer so the larvae don't burrow into the horses' legs and hatch their way out. How to observe nostril flare to figure out how much cooldown a horse needs. How to start a bath with the legs when a horse is too hot. How to understand that horses can't vomit, and if their intestines twist, things can go wrong fast. (This is called *colic* and can be deadly.) How to pick stones from their hooves, because a lame horse means everything will come to a stop, not to mention the guilt I would feel for my laziness. How to always clean up after myself, because if I don't, someone else has to.

A plaid shirt with pearl snap buttons hangs from Paul's bony shoulders. Rustler jeans barely cling to his hips, and white Velcro shoes from Walmart peek out below the cuffs. Through a stall slat I watch him hang hay for the horses: Using the stump below his right elbow—there's just enough of the joint left to allow him to flex and hold—he hoists a hay net halfway up to an eyelet in the corner of a stall. Then he grabs the bundle with his left hand, shoving the nylon string through the eyelet and pulling it toward his body so that the hay rises up, up. He ties a knot

in the string, and the horse comes to eat. When others hang hay, some horses will charge before it's ready. With Paul, every horse waits.

While my family of three cracks open, I fill my head with horses. I think of Rattler, the faded sorrel ridden by every new rider at the barn, her bony withers poking up at the crest of her neck. I think of an early lesson where I struggled to find my center of gravity while riding at a trot. When I tipped forward onto Rattler's neck, she gently slowed to a stop and then lifted her neck to ease me back into the saddle and keep me from falling.

I ping-pong between Dad's dark rental house, where I sleep on funny-smelling sheets, and Mom's bright condo, where I sleep in a trundle bed with my underwear in a drawer beneath the mattress. I miss when we all lived in one house and I had sheets with little flowers that matched my lilac-painted walls. I don't miss the fighting and yelling, or Dad threatening Mom with a pan of hot grease. Don't miss Dad standing outside and ringing the doorbell until Mom calls the police. Don't miss the time they each took one of my arms and pulled me back and forth.

*Continued on page 11*

## WHAT'S TRENDING NOW

### BEAUTIFY EQUINE HAIR AND BODY OIL

BY Neighked

Just a few drops of Beautify Equine Hair & Body Oil beholds the power to transform manes, tails and coats from dry, dull and drab to soft, smooth and supple with a sublime shine. Aromatic and soothing, the golden oil elixir floods wherever you apply it with instant hydration.

After using Beautify Oil, you'll be wondering how on earth you've been using old-school silicone sprays for so long! After all, you wouldn't use silicone sprays in your hair as we know how damaging they can be, so why would we use them on our horse's precious locks?

If you're anything like us, then you probably spend longer perfecting your horse's tresses, than you do your own so it seems ludicrous to use sub-par products on them. Instead, introduce your horse to a new way of grooming.

Immersing him/her in nourishing oils which will not only detangle and shine but will also boost the health of your horse's hair and coat. Stronger, faster-growing hair that is less likely to break and rub away (even in winter).



Dermatologically tested so that your horse never has to suffer from itchy-flaky skin ever again!

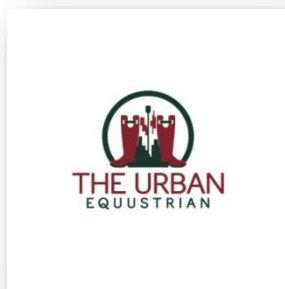
Have we also told you that Beautify Hair & Body Oil is a 3-in-1 product for your horse's beauty routine?

- ✓ **100%** of people agreed their horse's mane, tail and coat were hydrated, silky smooth and shiny after first use.
- ✓ **100%** of people agreed that it did not make their horse greasy and they can even use it under the saddle area.
- ✓ **100%** of people agreed that they will stick to using Beautify Oil over traditional mane/tail/coat sprays and other hot cloth products.
- ✓ **100%** of people agreed their horse's mane, tail and coat were significantly healthier and much easier to brush out even on in-between days of applying the product.

[www.neighked.com](http://www.neighked.com)



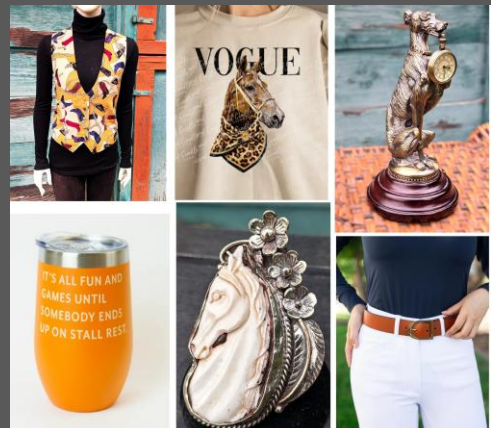
Our Store is currently open by Appointment.



[www.thenoblehorsevintage.etsy.com](http://www.thenoblehorsevintage.etsy.com)

Shop Online!

## New Items for April



When they take your trailer away so you won't buy anything at the auction



Hold onto what makes you happy.  
If it tries to buck you off, just hold on even tighter.



WHEN YOU WEAR CHAPSTICK DURING SHEDDING SEASON



EQUESTRIAN PROBLEM #179



GETTING YOUR HORSES EARS UP FOR A PICTURE

A boy once told me I ride like a girl

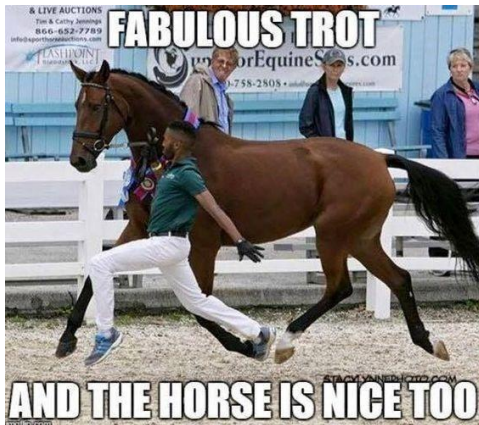


I told him, if he rode a little faster, he could too...

SOME WOMEN SPEND A FORTUNE ON SHOES



WITHOUT EVER GOING TO THE MALL



AND THE HORSE IS NICE TOO

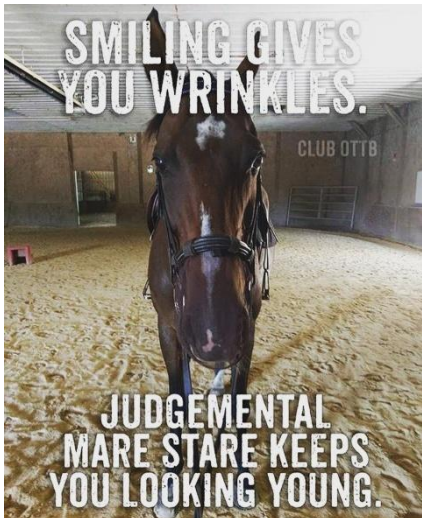
Me: Feels gross washing off dirty dishes

Also Me: Sticks my finger in a horses mouth to put a bridle on and continues my day without washing my hands



HARLS & GRACE

When you said "Friends with benefits" I assumed you meant you owned a tack shop or an indoor arena!



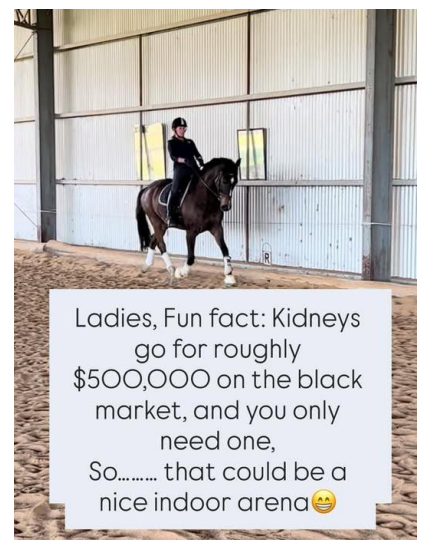
SMILING GIVES YOU WRINKLES.

CLUB OTTB

JUDGEMENTAL MARE STARE KEEPS YOU LOOKING YOUNG.



POV: misunderstood How to Horse instructions. Became a Hippo.



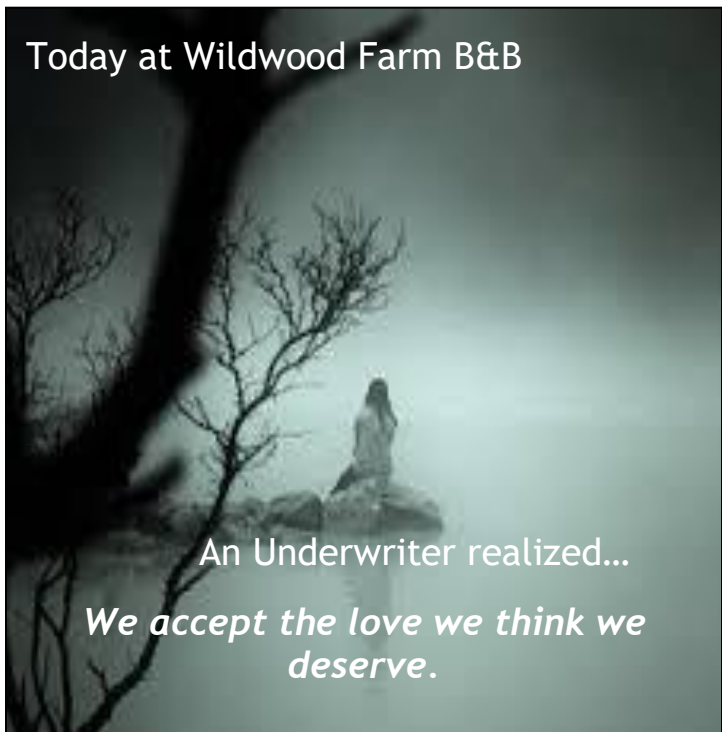
Ladies, Fun fact: Kidneys go for roughly \$500,000 on the black market, and you only need one, So..... that could be a nice indoor arena 😊

# WILDWOOD FARM B&B



## This is your moment.

Today at Wildwood Farm B&B



An Underwriter realized...

*We accept the love we think we deserve.*

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.

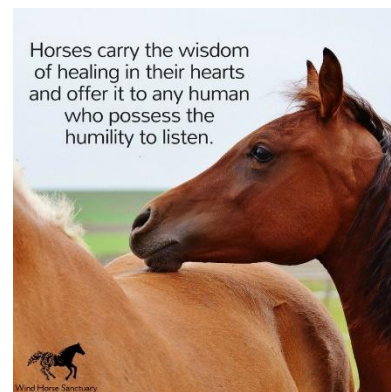
Come experience the power of possibility with these magnificent creatures and explore the abundance of silent repose.

[www.wildwoodfarmbandb.com](http://www.wildwoodfarmbandb.com)

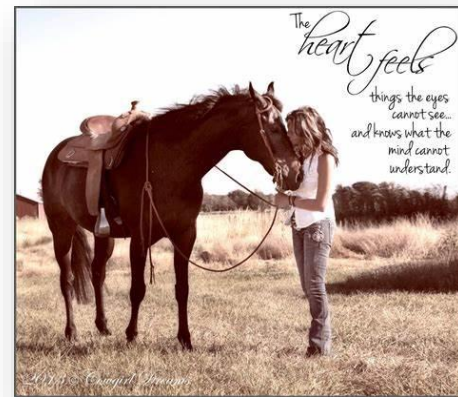
WILDWOOD FARM HAS IT ALL!



Some Horses Will Test You,  
Some Will Teach You,  
And Some Will Bring Out The Best In You.  
Equestrian Co.



Horses carry the wisdom  
of healing in their hearts  
and offer it to any human  
who possess the  
humility to listen.



*The heart feels  
things the eyes  
cannot see...  
and knows what the  
mind cannot  
understand.*

[WWW.PNWRiding.com](http://WWW.PNWRiding.com)

**PACIFIC NORTHWEST  
RIDING ACADEMY**



March 2, 2026

Summary for 02/01/2026 - 02/28/2026

33 alerts posted reporting on 36 confirmed cases

Ordered by State:

Disease	State	Confirmed
Equine Herpesvirus- Abortion	North Dakota	1
Equine Herpesvirus- Neurologic	Illinois	1
	Montana	1
	Ontario	1
	Virginia	2
	Wisconsin	1
Equine Herpesvirus- Respiratory	Idaho	1
	Maryland	1
	Virginia	1
	Washington	1
	Wisconsin	1
Equine Infectious Anemia	Alberta	1
	California	1
	Colorado	5
	Nevada	1
	Texas	2
Equine Influenza	Maryland	1
	Wyoming	3
Salmonellosis	Virginia	1
Strangles	Florida	1
	Maryland	1
	Michigan	1
	Ontario	5

Equine Disease Communication Center

## Nutrition Corner

### Can Nutrition Help a Horse Shed?

Some anecdotal reports suggest that feeding flax or black oil sunflower seeds can help horses shed out more quickly. This is likely due to the oil these feeds contain. However, I have found no scientific evidence to support this assertion. The best way to speed up the removal of old coat is rigorous grooming before and after exercise using a rubber curry comb or similar grooming tool. If the weather is warm enough, a bath will often help loosen hair. So will a good roll in a sandy arena. Don't be fooled into thinking that blanketing your horse will help them shed faster. Day length is what triggers hair loss, not body temperature.

### Fat and Horse Hair Coat Quality

While feeding fat to speed up shedding might be no more than placebo effect, adding more fat to the diet might help improve the new coat's quality. The hair shaft is coated in cuticle cells that contain a substantial amount of fat that helps retain moisture. These cells should lay flat, and when they're flat they reflect light beautifully. However, if damaged, moisture is lost from the hair shaft, and the hair becomes dry and no longer reflects light with the same brilliance. Additionally, pores in the skin release sebum, which is an oily substance that coats the hair shaft and helps maintain shine. Diets that don't provide adequate amounts of fatty acids could result in a dry hair coat that's more susceptible to damage and a dull appearance.

### Vitamins

Vitamin A is a key nutrient that plays a role in skin health, and while the equine dietary deficiencies are rare, they can occur if you're feeding older hay. While the precursor to vitamin A, beta-carotene, is abundant in fresh forages, it is lost from hay at a rate of almost 10% per month.

### Protein and Amino Acids

The hair shaft is made up mostly of the protein keratin. Diets that provide inadequate protein or that lack essential amino acids could result in reduced hair growth. This, in turn, could slow down shedding.

### Copper and Zinc's Role

Ensuring horses' dietary copper and zinc requirements are met will also help support coat color. Both these minerals impact melanin, the protein in hair that is responsible for pigmentation. If the hair contains inadequate amounts of melanin, it is unable to resist damage from ultraviolet light. This leads to oxidative damage and fading. Copper is also needed by the enzyme lysyl oxidase, which is necessary for the maintenance of the cross-bridges in collagen within skin. Without adequate copper these cross linkages are weakened, and the skin loses structural integrity.

### 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 to 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

## Down Memory Lane at Wildwood Farm MEET NUTMEG

In the summer of 2005, we received a call from a neighbor who had a horse she had adopted from a PMU facility in Canada. The mare was fairly young, but it turned out she was a little too much horse for her and she wanted to find her a more suitable home.

PMU horses can be tricky due to the confinement and mistreatment many experience. Thankfully this was one of the foals from a PMU mare, so although she may have been a bit traumatized at birth by being taken away from her mother at too young of an age, she was not exposed to the damaging conditions.

We went and looked at Nutmeg, and she was very sweet and quite substantial, even at 3 years old. She was a Belgian cross with a light chestnut color and a flaxen mane and tail. She was curious and respectful, and we felt we could give her the right training to make her a respectable citizen.

Our trainer at the time was a woman named Mickie Gould, and she had a lot of experience with you sport type horses. The two clicked and Nutmeg was a star student for her. In no time she was moving forward with a person on her back at the walk, trot and canter; and she had beautiful movement.

In October of that year – when she had been under saddle about 90 days – we decided to put her in a dressage clinic we were hosting with Gerd Reuter, a very well-known trainer from



Germany who came to Wildwood Farm about 3 times per year.

Mickie rode Nutmeg the first day and she did beautifully. That evening we spoke to Gerd to ask if he would be willing to rider her for us so we could get some sales video – having a rider of his stature would add to her appeal. He agreed and the next day we set up our video camera to film what we thought would be an amazing ride.

Nutmeg, however, had a different view. The moment she felt his weight in the saddle she went up and over and fell backwards onto Gerd. He didn't even have the reins gathered yet, it was the most surreal thing any of us had seen. And then she just stood there trembling. Clearly, we had tapped into something underlying with this horse.

Thankfully Gerd was only bruised, but when a horse reacts that way, they are essentially unsellable. Even after viewing the film numerous times, not knowing what set her off that way made her too much of a liability.

We ended up giving her to a local couple who did Medieval games and though she ran her rider into a wall when they tried her out, they decided she was worth the risk and took her home. She never became a safe horse.



**Aries**

Mar 21 - Apr 19

**Strengths: Intuitive, Aggressive, Passionate**

**Weaknesses: Moody, Impatient, Impulsive**

**Around the Stable: Fast and furious, this horse loves to kick up its heels and run!**

The Aries horse's fiery demeanor leads to a desire to always be the boss. Born a natural leader, this horse tends to act first and think later. Because of this impulsiveness, Aries horses require firm guidance to help them manage their bursting energy.

On the pasture, this horse is likely to be high in the pecking order. In the show ring, their fire and flashy movement will catch the eyes of judges, competitors, and crowds. The Aries horse may be a challenge for some to handle, but in the right hands, their character will shine.

These horses certainly enjoy a challenge and are extremely competitive. When waiting for their turn to enter the ring, they quickly grow impatient and often prance around. However, when the time comes, the Aries horse sure knows how to have fun!



**We celebrate these Birthdays in April!**

**Nancy Arend April 2nd, Lisa Boyer April 23<sup>rd</sup>,**

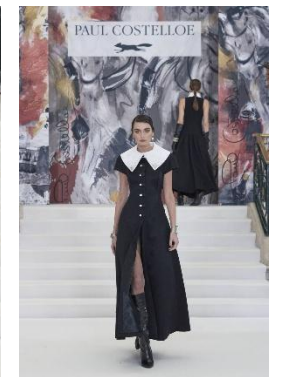
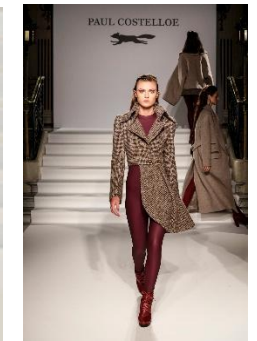
**Poncho April 14<sup>th</sup>, Penny April 1, Contessa April 6<sup>th</sup>, Charm April 6<sup>th</sup>,**

**Jackpot April 9<sup>th</sup>, Charlie April 14<sup>th</sup>, Belle April 15<sup>th</sup>, Cali April 15<sup>th</sup>,**

**Phoenix April 25<sup>th</sup>, Ronan April 26<sup>th</sup>, Cami April 26<sup>th</sup>, Romy April 29<sup>th</sup>,**

**Butters April 30<sup>th</sup>**

# PAUL COSTELLOE DRESSAGE FASHION COLLECTION



Missoula, Montana

# A Carousel for Missoula

A classic carnival ride that was carved to be untouchable.



In the heart of downtown Missoula is a literal dream come true: A Carousel for Missoula. The carousel was created by a local woodworker who agreed to carve ponies for a carousel so long as the town promised that no one would ever take it away. So to this day, the carousel continues to surprise and delight visitors.

Over the course of four years, woodworker Chuck Kaparich and a team of wood carvers, painters, and restorers built a full carousel with 38 permanent ponies, two chariots, 14 gargoyles, and the largest band organ in continuous use in the United States.

The carousel has been operational since 1995. As you go around, each pass affords riders the chance to grab a ring from a dragon's mouth. The person who snatches the brass ring wins a free ride.

Connected to the carousel is a handful of other attractions as well. The wood shops where craftsmen work on carving new ponies are available for live demonstrations. If you want a few wood chips to take home as a unique souvenir, they are even available in the gift shop, labeled "Pony Droppings." There's also a fantasy-styled playground attached called Dragon Hollow. These classic attractions are keeping the magic of old-school fun fairs alive. south. The dense forest obscures any view from the summit, but the peak is a magnificent end to a long hike.

## Know Before You Go

Rides are \$0.75 for children and seniors, \$2.25 for adults, and \$1.50 for an adult and child sharing a seat. You can ride the carousel from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from September through May and from at least 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. from June through August.

It is free to look at the carousel and play in the park. Parking is in a garage across the street, or street parking. The cost depends on where you park.

# The Basotho Pony



The **Basuto** or **Basotho Pony** is an African breed of small horse. It developed in the territory that is now South Africa, but is more closely associated with Lesotho (formerly Basutoland). In the twenty-first century it is reported to be close to extinction.

The Basotho Pony is found in Lesotho, which is an enclave of South Africa. It is used for exclusively for riding and only cattle are used for draft purposes in Lesotho purposes. The Basotho Pony was developed from the Cape Horse during the period after 1825. By the early 20th century the breed has almost disappeared due to exportation and crossing with Arab and Thoroughbred horses. During the latter part of the 20th century a breed society was formed to revive the breed. In addition to the walk, trot and canter, the Basotho has two additional gaits.

The origins of the Basuto Pony go back to the horses taken to southern Africa by the Dutch settlers who established the first European settlement in the area of the Cape of Storms in 1652 – there were no indigenous horses in the area. The first four of these were imported from Java by the Dutch East India Company in 1653; it is likely that they were of Arab or Barb type, but some may have been of Mongolian origin, as Mongolian horses had earlier been introduced to Java. A few Persian Arab stallions were later added to the horse population in the area when a ship sailing from Java to Persia ran aground on the South African coast. From about 1820 European horses of many types – Cleveland Bay, Friesian, Hackney, Norfolk Trotter, Oldenburger and Thoroughbred – were imported and cross-bred with local stock with the aim of increasing its size and "quality"; the Basuto Pony derives from horses that escaped this interbreeding, many of which were taken into Basutoland at about the time of king Moshoeshe I, the 1820s.

The Basotho Pony is a small, sturdy horse; height at the withers does not exceed 15 hands. It is well adapted to the mountain terrain in which it lives – it has good endurance, can withstand extreme temperatures, can graze on poor pasture and has strong thick-walled hooves that do not need to be shod. As mentioned, it has two gaits in addition to the usual walk, trot and gallop, one of them the stepped rack known in South Africa as the trippel. The coat may be grey or any of the usual dark colors.

Etusis Basotho Stud, Farm Etusis No. 75, PO Box No. 5, Karibib 9000 Namibia, phone: 062252/1603 - Fax 061/223994

*Cont'd from page 1*

At school I imagine the soft tickle of horse whiskers against the back of my hand and daydream of running my fingers down the inside of their flexor tendons, from knee to fetlock, until they lift their hooves for me to pick clean. I think of how they wait for me to come to the gate in the afternoons and how they linger when I turn them back out to pasture after a ride. I can tell they hope I'll come back.

Girls in the barn say that, when Paul was younger, he was a volunteer firefighter and had an accident with a downed power line while trying to save a kid. That's how he lost his arm. All that electricity also blew a hole in the top of his head, leaving a round scar you can see when you're looking down on him from the back of a horse. But the kid lived.

The girls say Paul used to ride Grand Prix. Owners paid him big money to take the high, fancy stadium jumps on their horses. Once, a horse named Sputnik, who was famous for raring back and taking the jump like a rocket, fell on Paul and broke some of his ribs, but he got back on and finished the course anyway.

The girls wonder why Marsha married Paul, because she's young and sweet and pretty with great skin, and he's old and not that good-looking and can be a grump and smokes a lot. But they also say Paul took Marsha and her daughter in after Marsha's no-account ex-husband left them.

The girls say you don't want to pee off Paul, because when Paul gets mad, it's very bad. I've seen girls leaving the arena with red faces and tears. I've seen Marsha leaving the arena after Paul teaches her, and sometimes she's quiet and doesn't look me in my eye and sets her saddle down on the saddle tree extra hard. Disappointing Paul is the worst feeling. But when he says, "There you go! That's right!" it's the best.

Every now and then it isn't the rider who needs to learn something; it's the horse. Paul will tell the rider to get off, and he'll get on and show the horse who's boss. Within minutes the horse gets it. Girls say there was even a time Paul got on, and it looked like the horse was crumbling under him, but really it was *bowing* for him. It put one leg out, and Paul bowed his head and tipped his hat—"Like in a movie!" The girls say you don't see that too often. Might never see it again.

They also say that when Marsha calls to the house for Paul to come teach you, it's a good thing, because it means you're ready for the next stage in your learning.

Dad's peed-off and Paul's peed-off are not the same. Paul's doesn't stick. Dad's latches on to me like an anchor. I try to move, but I can't. Whether I'm with him or away from him, his anger is always there. Pulling. Holding.

I am ten when his rage starts shooting through my hands to pop the horse with the reins while I ride, or flying down my legs to kick the horse with my heels. I learn I can be mean too, and it feels glorious: *Do this, and I'll pull. Do that, and I'll hold. Try to move. You can't. I'm stronger than you.* When I pop the reins, it numbs the memory of Dad yelling at me for using too much tape on a package, for dotting my *i*'s with little circles, for putting on pounds. When I kick, away goes the red-hot embarrassment of being in the Burger King drive-through with him, waiting for him to say, "Hamburger," and when they ask, "Would you like cheese?" for him to fire back, "Did I say cheese?" When I pop or kick, poof, away it all goes.

I keep this up lesson after lesson until Marsha calls Paul out from the house. "Jerk her like that," he says, "and she'll never give you her head again." I'm sheepish. Caught. He has seen through me.

This is what we're always working on: the horse giving me her head, meaning she isn't bracing to resist me. She feels soft in my hands. We're connected, her neck arcing, her body bending to mine, willing. I want her to listen to me, to do what I say no matter how I say it, but I also want her to be supple. Maybe I can't have both.

In time I see that a jerk of the reins or a kick of the heel is blunt and quick, but there's another possibility. Something quieter, deeper. Like how the horse knows when I'm holding my muscles tight or when I'm holding my breath, even when I don't realize it. The horse always tells me, always makes me aware of what I feel, of what my feelings make me do. The horse won't let me lie about what's going on inside me, not even to myself.

Because the horse doesn't let me get away with anything, I stop trying to get away with anything. Paul sees this and says, "Yes." Marsha sees this and says, "Good." A thing that felt secret is no longer secret. The horse is supple and willing because I am supple and willing.

Sometimes my temper is too strong, and I slip, but mostly I stop trying to break something precious, because I understand it's precious.

At the barn, when a dappled gray mare comes off the racetrack and starts kicking holes through her stall—*pow, pow, pow!*—I touch her velvet muzzle over the stall gate, and she hangs her head and closes her eyes. She does this only for me. When other girls try to touch her, she steps back.

I am twelve, and Tampa Miss becomes my first horse. I don't know exactly how she came to be mine, but I figure it's my mom's doing since my dad is always talking about how it's hard enough to pay my child support. I call her Missy. Our colors, which we wear to competitions, are pink and black. I've developed a habit of cocking my left wrist, which Marsha says will make the bit cock sideways in the horse's mouth. I don't want to do that to Missy, so I try to remember to soften my wrist and curl it in, but Marsha and Paul still have to remind me.

At first Missy bucks and takes off sometimes, but she gets used to me, and I get used to her. Something grows between us. When we're in the flow, the edges of our bodies and the leather of the tack disappear. I can feel it, and Paul sees it and shouts, "Now you're cooking with grease!"

I'm flat on my back in the dirt after Missy refused a jump and I flew from the saddle. She gallops toward the barn, and Paul's head eclipses the sun that blazes into my eyes. "You haven't ridden until you've fallen off at least a hundred times," he says, extending a hand to help me up. I'm maybe twenty falls in—plenty to go before I'm a rider. I take his hand, get up, dust off, take Missy from Marsha, who has fetched her from the barn, and climb back into the saddle.

Marsha drives us to competitions, Paul in the passenger seat of their truck, me in the back, Missy or another horse in the trailer. We stop at Waffle House or Taco Bell, and after we eat, Marsha and I wait in the truck for Paul to finish his cigarette. Whether I'm winning grand champion or hitting the dirt while my horse runs off because something spooked it, I'm always hoping to make Paul proud. Years go by like this: years in which these people and these animals are my family.

Missy has a foal, and I decide to sell her and the little one to another girl. I put the money in my pocket, but it wears a hole there. It hurts but also feels like what's right. I've gone off to college. One summer I work as an exercise rider for racehorses, and I fall off every day for weeks, even getting kicked in the back once, until I finally start landing on my feet. According to Paul's count I'm a rider, but I don't feel like going to the barn much anymore.

After I graduate, I move out of state. I work different jobs and try on lots of versions of myself, including the angry one who bites back, but none of them ever feels quite right. I want to be soft and sweet, to be a sun like Marsha, because I can see how good it makes everyone feel. But I fear people will take advantage of me if I don't stay ready to bite. So I stay ready. I'm still trying to be my father's daughter, my mother's daughter, the right kind of daughter, the kind who receives their love, but I'm starting to wonder if all the trying is wearing me out. Maybe I need to start pleasing myself. I start smoking cigarettes like Paul, but mine have filters, and I hold them in my fingers, not my lips.

Back home for a visit, I go to the barn to see Paul. (I don't know yet that this will be the last time.) He has no eyebrows. Marsha says he was carrying his home oxygen tank when he leaned over to light a cigarette on the stove and the gas blew up in his face. He has scars on his cheeks and forehead. He says nothing but gives me a wiry hug. His body is thinner. Wispy. I wonder if he regrets taking so many breaths through burning tobacco, as if the smoke gave him life.

A year or so later Mom calls to tell me Paul is gone. I hang up, smelling the sweet molasses scent of horses' necks and dank alfalfa and his swirling smoke. I find myself wondering whether Paul gave me horses or horses gave me Paul.

Two decades later I decide to get on a horse again—a New Year's resolution. By late January I'm on the back of an eighteen-year-old gelding named Ace. The dark-gray coat of his youth has turned white; I rely on a monthly bottle of dye to keep my own gray covered. I'm at a much fancier barn, all white fences and bronze accents.

In the saddle I experience the familiar sense of being held. At the end of the big indoor arena, where no one can see, I let my tears fall into Ace's mane and whisper, "Thank you." I close my eyes, my hands moving with the bob of his head, my hips swaying in rhythm with his steps.

After a few lessons I realize the old habit has persisted: My left wrist is cocked out, not rounded in. I draw my attention to it, making sure the line from my elbow to my hand to the horse's mouth is unbroken, so that the bit feels soft in Ace's mouth.

I wonder if there are ever enough lessons for us to learn some things; if I'll always have to be reminded, or to remind myself, that there's a girl still living inside me. A girl who, because it felt like the only way, became unruly. A girl who fell in love with an animal and let it show her there are many ways to be.

My father died of a heart attack two decades ago. In a rarely opened drawer, I found a picture of him standing next to Missy and me at a show. People tell me he was proud, that he loved me. Maybe he was. But when Ace and I find our rhythm, it's Paul's voice I hear in my head: *Now you're cooking with grease!* Mostly, though, the voice in my head sounds like me.