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Age 14

Relax and Ride

Everyone feels their horse should be in the hall of fame. I think every horse should be in the hall of fame, but it wouldn't exactly be a hall. We would have to create a monument that shows how horses change the lives of each and every owner in the world. I know Grace, my seven year old appaloosa, has changed mine.

Grace was a surprise for my twelfth birthday. I had been begging for a horse for years and saving almost every cent I got for one. My cousin Michelle had trained Grace and I went up to Minnesota to see if I liked her. I knew right away that she was the horse for me. I wanted an appaloosa and Grace was perfect. Finally, on November 24th, my birthday wish from all the other years came true. At first, I was a bit scared of handling her on the ground, but now I can load her in the trailer (sometimes she refused to do when we got her) myself. She has taught me to be confident and never give up.

Only a year after having Grace, I had to stop riding for a while. It wasn't because I was hurt or lost interest, but because my mom was in the hospital and I was there almost every second of every day for weeks. I missed school and I couldn't even think about riding me horse. I was in shock. I had no idea why my mom stopped breathing, no one did, but the few times I did see Grace while going through this tough time helped me relax for a few moments.

It was five in the morning on a cold Saturday in January when I suddenly woke up to my dad saying things like "she's not breathing." My heart pounded as I rushed into my parent's bedroom and saw my dad on the phone with 911 and my mom lying there with her eyes shut gasping for air.

Days later I was sitting in the hospital with my family. My aunt from Minnesota whose daughter had trained Grace was there. I had been spending night after night at the hospital, and barely spoken a word. She and my other horse-loving family offered to take me out to ride Grace. At first, I didn't want to leave my mom, knowing something could happen. My dad encouraged me to take a break and go, so I reluctantly went. Once I got there I could still hardly concentrate. We saddled up and when I got on, I galloped my frustration away. As Grace's hooves pounded into the sand, my anger and confusion began to pound out of my chest. Soon, I was smiling for the first time in weeks as Grace and I darted around the arena.

"She's not going to make it," were the words that came from the doctors and my dad's mouth. Suddenly I'm winded from hearing this brief, but explanatory sentence. I'm lucky to have so many good friends and family to help me try to comprehend these words, but getting my mind off it for a while was the best thing I could do. I wasn't sure how I could do it though. I tried playing games and watching movies at the hospital, but

everything I did reminded me of the harsh reality I had to face. The walls, the signs, sadness in the movie, and all my family there with me, just surrounded me and took me back to where I was. I had to get out some more, but I didn't want to leave my mom. So I stayed until I didn't need to anymore because my mom went to heaven.

Once I was out, I rode day after day until the sun set. Grace was probably in the best shape she's ever been in. I was fearless, jumping over poles and starting more challenging trail rides with my arena-horse. Usually I tried to clear my mind when I got on, so it was just me and Grace. Some days I couldn't clear my mind. Tears streamed down my cheeks and the wind wipped them off my face as we galloped. Sometimes we stopped and I just sat there, my expression blank, rewinding everything in my mind and playing it over and over until Grace moved. They say petting an animal calms your nerves and relieves you from stress. I believe grooming, riding, and just being around Grace helped me.

That summer, I signed up for 4-H. It kept me occupied and I had a great time riding with all the other kids. I had never shown before, but Grace knew just what to do. She taught me how to get her collected, she taught me how to keep trying even when they refuse to walk over a bridge. Finally it was time for the county fair. I didn't expect to win anything, but Grace being the amazing horse she is, won first in Western Horsemanship and Second in Western Pleasure for me. I nearly jumped out of the saddle when the announcer said, "Jessie and Grace for first in Western Horsemanship." I grinned and patted Grace while my dad took my picture with my first trophy. Grace isn't a big show pony, but I'm so glad we could get first in our first show!

Grace and I have come a long way. From me being too timid and scared, to us jumping over giant logs on the trail, Grace helps me overcome fear and set new goals. Horses are like therapy too. They relieve your stress and help you through tough times. Grace helped me through the hardest time of my life, and the best times I've ever had was when I was sitting on her back. I know she's always there for me and when I need to get my mind off something and just relax I can always count on her to cheer me up.