



## Mal & Me

Robyn E., Maine

I remember the first time I ever saw a horse...mane flying, hooves pounding on the ground like mallets. Surrendering itself to the land, to the open sky and sun. It was the proudest thing I had ever seen. It was the greatest feeling I had ever felt...at least until my first ride.

I clung tightly to my mom's arm, almost dragging her to the ground. "Robyn, if you cling to my arm any harder, you're going to pull it right off!", she said. I let go a little bit, but I was still wondering why we were there.

"Mom," I said. "Remind me again why we're here?" She sighed and walked on. "You'll see," she said. We walked right up to a big trailer. A woman came out of it and smiled at both of us. She started to talk to my mom, and one time, tried to talk to me. But, I wasn't paying attention; I was focusing my eyes through the morning mist, looking at the horse trailers, and riders, and, of course, the horses.

Mom interrupted my thoughts, "Dear, it's time to go the ring," she said. The Ring?, I thought to myself. I had no idea what she was getting at. But once we got there, it didn't take a detective to figure it out.

Horses! Horses! Horses galore! Fat ones! Skinny ones! Clean ones! Mean ones! But all of them, so wonderfully proud and beautiful! I practically ripped my mom's arm off just trying to get out of her grip, but she clung tight as she talked to my Aunt Missy. I wonder what they're talking about? I pondered, but not for too long.

"Say Robyn, you want to ride in the show ring?," Mom asked. I had never even sat on top of a horse before! But before I had a chance to answer, a big, white pony walked right up to me with a person holding it on a lead. "This is Mal," my Aunt Missy told me. I couldn't believe it. Asking me to get up on this horse was like daring me to jump over the Empire State Building in a single bound! But hey, what's life without risk?

I turned around to mom and nodded my head vigorously. "It's settled then, Robyn! You'll be riding Mal!" my Aunt Missy said. But I wasn't listening; I was already turned around, struggling to get up

on the tall pony. But he stood still, and apparently very patient to 5-year-old girls. My mom and Aunt Missy pulled me off the poor pony.

A woman in a bright red jacket gave me a number on a piece of cardboard paper with a safety pin attached. I hugged the number to my chest. It said 132. That was my lucky number.

We had to wait about an hour before my turn. But to me, it seemed like I could have walked to Mexico and back, and it wouldn't have been my turn! But, finally, we could hear a woman on the speaker say, "All lead line egg and spoon contestants please come to the ring." I practically flung out of my chair. Egg and spoon, I know, I know, sounds huge. But to tell you the truth I couldn't have been happier.

They lifted me up onto Mal's back. I swear, he lifted me up right into the clouds of heaven, lifted me over the Earth's atmosphere. And yes, over the Empire State Building! Aunt Missy held onto the lead rope, as much as I want to roam free on his back.

I was a natural. But I was still nervous. Mal tossed his head up and nickered as if to say, "Just sit back and let me do the work!" I trusted him. We had a bond and I had only been on him for 5 minutes! We entered the ring, calm as a sleeping cat. I lifted up the egg and spoon proudly, put my heels down, and kept my chin high.

Walking, my egg stayed put. I heard the speaker lady say, "Very good! Now, if everyone will trot, please." She asked. We all slowly but surely went into the trot. Mal was a round, heavy pony, but he struggled to keep going on the trot. My egg dropped once, but didn't break. Aunt Missy picked it up and put it back on the spoon. About 15 seconds later, it dropped again, and broke. I wasn't the first one though. I was the 4th to drop mine, and there were 6 contestants. We all listened and watched eagerly as the speaker lady came to announce and give out the ribbons.

"1st place goes to...Laura on Sugar Pi!" she said into the microphone. Everyone cheered for a few seconds and stopped. They wanted to hear the rest of the winners. "Okay, next is 2nd place which goes to...Tessa on Mr. Friendlys!" Everyone cheered again and Tessa got her ribbon. Everyone went quiet again. "Okay, 3rd place goes to...Robyn on Mal!" Everyone cheered once again, but I blocked it all out. 3rd place in my first show ever! I couldn't believe what I was hearing!

I was assured by an outreached hand holding a silky, yellow and white ribbon in my face. My shaky hand grabbed it, and I whispered a "thank you". She smiled and nodded at me. I held the yellow ribbon to my chest like a precious stone.

My mom and dad walked up to me smiling. "Congratulations!" my Mom said. My dad gave a play punch in the arm. "Ya, you won a ribbon!" I clipped the ribbon onto Mal's bridle and smiled. I hugged his head. "No," I said, "Me and Mal won the ribbon, together!"