My First Experience with Horses Valerie L., Wisconsin

I pressed my nose against the van's window and watched as the pastures flew by. I wiggled with excitement. Today was my thirteenth birthday, and today could be the day that I got my first horse.

"We're almost there," my mom commented, eyeing me in the rearview mirror. I nodded wordlessly and fidgeted some more. What if the horse didn't like me? What if I didn't like him? What if he was old and couldn't even trot??

"Here we are!" Mom exclaimed. She pointed to the left side of the road. There, in an enclosed pasture all by himself, was a small black and white paint. He couldn't have been more than fourteen hands high, and he stared at us grouchily.

That can't be the horse I came to see! I moaned, trying not to be disappointed. That horse wasn't what I wanted at all! We pulled into the driveway and were met by a barking, happy dog. A moment later a lady appeared, holding the lead rope of a chestnut mare.

"Hi!" she said. I instantly liked her. Her voice was quiet and soft, and I could tell by the way the mare listened to her words that she was definitely an awesome horsewoman.

"Hi," Mom said, scratching the dog behind his ears. "We're here to look at one of your horses. Char e-mailed me about him."

"Oh?" the lady said. "Which horse?"

"Mr. Moo."

"Oh, I love Moo!" she gushed. "He's such a sweetie. Let me go get Char." The lady turned her horse around and walked away. A minute later another woman came out.

"I'm Char," she explained, leading the way behind the barn to another pasture. I sighed in relief. The horse out front was not Mr. Moo. "Moo's out here. Let me get him for you." Char grabbed a lead rope and opened the pasture gate. I watched her as she threaded her way through the horses, occasionally telling a horse (by twirling the lead rope) to move. And then I saw him.

At the far end of the pasture a black and white paint gelding grazed. His stunning black splotches against his gleaming white body left me star struck. Moo's face was exactly half white and half black. His tail was black, but it was streaked with a reddish chestnut. As Char fastened the rope on his halter, he willingly followed her calmly out the gate and over to me. Char smiled and handed me his lead rope. I stroked his forehead, and Moo seemed to like that. He eyed me with his friendly brown eyes. I began walking, but he didn't follow. I tried again. Moo didn't move.

"What's the matter, Sweetie?" I murmured, petting his face. He looked at me, and if horses

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could smile he would've been grinning from ear to ear. He obviously enjoyed being stroked on his face. After I had given him "lovies," I started walking again. This time he followed.

"They make an awesome team," the lady we had met when we first drove up said. "Look how he walks right next to her!" Smiling, I led Moo over to a hitching post and tied him there. Char brought out a box of grooming supplies, and I began to use a rubber curry comb on him.

"He likes that." Char smiled as Moo closed his eyes in sheer pleasure as I curried him. His winter coat was still there, but it came off as I brushed him. After the grooming was finished (and I was covered with bits of his winter coat!), I saddled Moo and slipped his bridle on. Char rode him around an outdoor arena, showing me his walk and his trot, which was the coolest trot I had ever seen.

After she had been riding a bit, Char stopped him and said, "Your turn!" I swung (and I must admit it wasn't very gracefully at first) onto Moo's back and began to walk him around the arena. I asked him for a trot and he obliged, trotting happily around the arena.

I must have been smiling, because Char laughed, "You just seem to glow when you ride Moo." It was true. Moo was the best horse I had ever ridden, and I knew that I could have a great friendship with him.

At last I dismounted, saying, "If I don't get off now I'll keep riding forever!"

"What do you think?" Char questioned, looking from my mom to me.

"I love him," I said simply. It wasn't an exaggeration. I had previously looked at another horse, but he had not loved me, and I could not bring myself to love him. Moo's personality worked perfectly with mine, and I could see us at my house, riding around… My mom's voice interrupted my dreams.

"If her father has no objections, I think she's got herself a horse."

"I'm sure Dad will say yes," I said excitedly.

"I'm sure he will, too," Mom said happily. "Can you keep Mr. Moo for us? We're going out of state next month, so we won't be able to bring him home until we get back."

"Sure, I can do that for you. I won't show him to anyone else. Before you bring him home, would you like to come back and ride Moo some more?" Char smiled, knowing the question's answer.

"Yes!" I nodded vigorously.

Over the next month I went back to ride Moo. The more I saw and rode him, the more I knew this was the horse I wanted. Today, almost a year later, my horse and I are still together. I know that we will be together forever. He is my dream horse, literally the kind of horse I always wanted. As a little girl I dreamed of having a horse (what little girl didn't?). Dreams do come true. How do I know that? My horse, the black and white paint gelding I met on May 10th, 2006, is my dream come true.

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