



ALLYCE'S ATTIC

"OF HORSES and DADS"

by MARY ALLYCE

Say the word "horse" and you'll get one of two reactions, illustrated by a conversation I had with a friend. "Ron and I took a horse drawn carriage ride when we were in New York," she said. "It was a beautiful night and it was so romantic and then the driver put a blanket over our laps . . ." And here her nose wrinkled and she screwed up her mouth in obvious distaste. "And it smelled like a HORSE!"

My response? "I love the way horses smell."

That was the end of that conversation.

I always loved the smell of horses, which can be a problem for a horse crazy kid in a non-horse family. The solution is to get at least one parent on board with your passion for all things horse. In our family it was me and my dad. My mom was of the horses-smell-horses-are-dirty persuasion all her life. I don't know for sure, but I'm betting her nightly prayers included, "And please let Mary out grow this horse crazy nonsense."

My dad jumped on the horse bandwagon when he bought our first horse, then another and another and so on and so on and scoobie doobie doo. Eventually, one purchase was a stallion and he needed mares and they all needed a farm and we were in the horse "business". Fortunately, my dad, who was a mechanical and aeronautical engineer, was also in an engineering business, a lot more lucrative than the horse "business". Anyone who has ever fed, vetted, shod and kept horses will understand. He also bought a guest ranch in Colorado, which is another subject altogether.

At the horse farm, we raised American Saddlebreds and after watching me show for years, my dad decided at the age of 65, he wanted in on the action and learned to drive fine harness horses

For those not familiar with performance caliber Saddlebreds, they are a handful and then some. As high energy and high powered as race horses, they can get impatient with mere mortals and the horse that became my dad's favorite was all that and more.

Ch. Bi My Chi Town was a gorgeous mahogany bay with the kind of headset and athletic leg action Saddlebred owners prize. His

antics became legendary – not always in a good way – and the more he misbehaved, the more my dad adored him. It was testament to the skill of our trainers that Dad was able to show him at all and they were successful all over the Midwest, eventually earning their permanent "Champion" designation.

Horses were the bond between us and together we shared very special horses and very special times. He did say of my horse addiction, "There should be rehabs for people like you," but he was as happily addicted as I was and together we remained a puzzlement to Mom.

People come here to the Hill Country, to Bandera, to see "a real, live horse close up." Excepting the to "horses smell" crowd, horses are magnets, drawing people to them. Horses represent freedom, power, beauty. Here they also represent the Western lifestyle. An old proverb says, "Horses are God's gift to man." Winston Churchill said, "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man." Women, too.

Horses have shown me compassion. They have partnered with me in a way that is purely magical. Horses have broken my heart. Horses have shown me to the ground! Or as a friend says, horsemen don't "fall off - they get thrown!" Take that to the bank. Thrown? Kicked? Bitten? Stepped on? No matter. When they breathe on you, all is forgiven.

Sorry, Mom. I'll never outgrow my fascination with horses. And as we celebrate Fathers' Day in June, "Thank you, Dad."

It's been the ride of my life.

