



Author's Note

My daughter was five years old the first time I saw the power of horses to make a child smile, laugh, and believe anything is possible. On the day of her first riding lesson, I watched her lift a pony's foot to pick out rocks that had gotten stuck in its hooves, saw her concentrate so hard to steer that pretty pony around the ring, and heard her giggle with delight at her pony's breath on her neck after the lesson.

My little girl is twenty now. Back then, I was working many hours a week at a new job. As a family, we were dealing with upheaval and uncertainty brought about by divorce. The barn became a respite for us both — a place far away from the “real world,” where nothing much mattered except for the horses and their power to make you forget or make you remember — whichever you needed most.

I was thirty-three when I started riding with my girl, thirty-six when we bought our first horse, and forty-two the first (and only) time I competed. Together, my daughter and I have ridden mules in national forests, jumped horses over logs and fences and narrow creeks, and played polo on ponies in a dusty field. We've cantered through pastureland and mountain trails and have been led by sure-footed equines safely down steep, rocky cliffs. As my daughter grew up, we were connected through our love of horses, a gift my daughter gave to me.

For thousands of years, people have shared the earth with horses. They've been our partners in tilling soil and winning wars, clearing land and transporting us to places both near and far. The power that horses have brought to my life has not so much to do with the power of physical strength or endurance or hard work, though these are surely good lessons I've learned from my *Equus ferus caballus* friends. I'm thinking more of the power of spirit — the power that comes from being present to the day, of remembering to breathe, and of discovering a shared language not of words but of feelings, images, and tiny gestures.

I am forty-eight years old and only just now beginning to understand that for all these years, horses have not been taking me away from the “real world” but bringing me there. After all, what could be more real than being still and silent outdoors with a friend, listening to birds of the meadow and forest settle down, watching the moon rise, and knowing you are loved?

