

One Thousand Pounds of Wild

By Nancy Martz

Like most farm kids, I longed for a pony. We had Pete and Bally, Grampa's gentle pair of shaggy draft horses; however, standing 19 hands high and weighing 2000 pounds, they were not pony material for me at my 40 pounds. Then one day I climbed off the school bus to see Dad currying a fat black pony down by the barn. He looked at me with a grin so wide it nearly closed his eyes and introduced me to Rosy, a pregnant Shetland.

Dad had also purchased a small riding cart to rig up behind Rosy, and I rode out one driveway and into the other and all around the farm buildings in absolute glee. Dad would watch with the same joy. Rosy gave birth to a tiny, buckskin colt that we adoringly raised like a pet puppy, and that was the beginning of Dad's equestrian passion. Every so often I'd get off the school bus and see a new horse in the pasture. Dad added American Quarter horses, an Appaloosa, a Palomino, and several Arabians, one who brought into our world another sweet colt. Dad loved everything about them, took great pride in them, and caring for them was his way to relax from farm work.

One new addition stood out. Prince was a black, 17 hands tall, majestic Tennessee Walking Horse. Heavily muscled, he cantered around the pasture bowing his great neck and holding his tail high and away from his rump. Lifting his knees, he pranced like a show horse. I was star-struck when Dad gave him to me. His power and grandness were thrilling but also a little intimidating, and Dad warned me never to let Prince get the bit in his teeth. I bonded so thoroughly with Prince that in spite of his phenomenal stature, he was as much my pet as Rosy's little colt.

One Saturday I took Prince on a ride around our section, including one mile of highway and three of gravel. We cantered leisurely on a stretch of concrete surface by the ditch. Cars passed without issue until a semi driver passed right next to us blasting his air horn. I saw the driver laughing as Prince twisted and reared in mortal fear, took control of the bit, and stampeded hell bent up the highway's edge. I clung to his neck and saw his wild eyes red with terror, his body lathering. I knew any misstep would roll us into the ditch with Prince's thousand pounds on top of me. A quarter mile ahead we had to turn 45 degrees onto gravel, and Prince covered it in seconds. I'll never know how we made that turn, or how I stayed in the saddle. He continued at full strength and speed slowing only when Dad ran out to our driveway. Mama was relieved that semi driver was too far gone for Dad to chase him down, although Dad did tear down the road in his red pickup all the way to the truck stop 18 miles away looking for him. He and Prince shared instincts that day that might have ended much differently.