

Brave, I Am Not

*By Suzy Hopkins*

My new husband knew I loved and rode horses all of my life. He encouraged me to buy a horse. I knew what I wanted – something special.

After much searching I found her – the color of a mink with a white mane and tail. Gorgeous! I named her Missy.

I had owned her for two weeks and was keeping her at a large busy training stable. One morning during a lesson of eight or ten students I was just mounting when Missy bolted – running as fast as she could into the middle of the arena. Over the many years of riding lessons I had been taught how to jump off a running horse. You always hold onto the reins since a loose horse, in any situation, will cause other horses nearby to also bolt which is dangerous for their riders. This caused a violent yank of my left arm that broke and dislocated my left shoulder. As I lay writhing and screaming in pain in the dirt someone called an ambulance.

At the emergency room they gave me gallons of valium in order to what is euphemistically called ‘reduce the dislocation’ which meant putting my shoulder back into place. This resolved the immediate problem but began a two month process of wearing my arm in a sling in order for the broken part to heal. Unfortunately, the dislocation had stretched and frayed the nerve that runs from fingertip to shoulder. Nerve pain is horrible because it doesn’t lessen daily but remains vigilant for eight weeks. That kind of pain can make you crazy. Once the nerve pain subsided and the break healed my arm was frozen at my side. Over the next months I had to walk my hand up the shower wall after the warm water relaxed the muscles some. This was intensely painful but was vital to regain the full use of my left arm and shoulder.

By the time I was able to return to riding my horse months had passed. I kept putting it off, fearful that my mare would bolt again. My husband was determined that I go back since he said when I had a horse in my life was the time when I was happiest.

With hesitation I arrive at the barn where my best friend and trainer Al had been caring for Missy for the past months. I groom and saddle and bridle my horse. I ask Al to hold onto the reins at the bit to prevent Missy from being able to run as I am mounting. I tell him how scared I am. More like terrified. I say, “My whole body is a pounding heartbeat.” From the top of my head to the bottom of my riding boots.

I got through this day somehow and rode Missy as well as other exciting horses for many more years. Brave, I am not, however it meant too much to me to stop enjoying what I love the most.