

Extraordinary Summer of the White Horse

By Suzy Hopkins

It's earlier than usual for me to wake up, but my eyes are open. Saturday! A May breeze is filling the air with the scent of lilacs. It's my favorite part of the day. I want to get out of the house before my parents get up and start fighting about not having enough money. I whisper, "I'm out'a here." I grab a big apple and Mitzie. I zip down the secret path in the woods, startling a sleeping family of raccoons, to visit my friend the old Moccasin Man, who also lives in the State Park. I have lived in this Park all my life. *How boring!* None of my school friends come visit or sleep over. Their parents tell them it's too far to drive. I'm the very last kid every day on the bus. Luckily for me, the bus driver loves horses, too. She tells me stories about the horse she had when she was a kid.

I made the secret path years ago so it's well worn. Today I notice there are new footprints on the path - ones I don't recognize. Mitzie sniffs them but doesn't act afraid. I can't wait to ask Moccasin Man. He'll know what they are.

As I come into the clearing I'm shocked to see a white horse with Moccasin Man. *What a beauty!* I don't dare move but Mitzie goes right over, barking loudly. Still not moving I say, "What's her name?" Moccasin Man doesn't seem to hear me. Quietly I tip toe towards him.

He turns as I reach him, smiling broadly. "Her name is Wind After Rain. Call her Windy if you want."

I can't believe I'm so close to a real horse. Barely breathing I say, "Where did you get her?"

"I had her when I was a boy. My people gave her back to me because she is too old to help them do their work."

"Can I touch her?"

"Speak to her."

Not knowing how to talk to a horse I say, "You're beautiful." Her nose is right next to my face. I can feel her breathing on my cheek. *What a thrill!* My mind is whirring. "Maybe I could ride her someday."

"How about now?"

"Really? I don't know how."

"I'll lead her."

"OH MY GOSH! I'm actually going to ride a horse. How do I get on?" Moccasin Man lifts me up but I'm so clumsy Windy scoots away. After several tries I am sitting on his beautiful mare with a huge smile on my face. My heart is pounding as he leads her around outside his cabin and the little moccasin store. I never want to get off. Mitzie scampers behind us on her little legs.

As the sunny day turns warm, Moccasin Man says, "Enough for now."

He slides me off Windy. I sit on the big gray rock by his cabin just to soak in what this could

mean for the coming summer. Sixth grade will be over soon. I can't tell my Mom and Dad because they might not want me riding a horse. "I'll come every day to help you with the moccasins if you will teach me to ride."

"Okay," he says. "I could use the help."

All the way home I'm trying to figure out how to avoid telling my parents and not explode from the excitement.