

A FATHER'S EXPLANATION: WHY HE HAD HORSES FOR HIS DAUGHTER

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My daughter turned sixteen years old today; which is a milestone for most people. Besides looking at baby photos and childhood trinkets with her, I took time to reflect on the young woman my daughter had become and the choices she would face in the future.

As I looked at her I could see the athlete she was, and determined woman she would soon be. I started thinking about some of the girls we knew in our town who were already pregnant, pierced in several places, hair every color under the sun, drop outs, drug addicts and on the fast track to no-where, seeking surface identities because they had no inner self esteem. The parents of these same girls have asked me why I "waste" the money on horses so my daughter can ride. I'm told she will grow out of it, lose interest, discover boys and all kinds of things that try to pin the current generation's "slacker" label on my child. I don't think it will happen, I think she will love and have horses all her life.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she has compassion. She knows that we must take special care of the very young and the very old. We must make sure those without voices to speak of their pain are still cared for.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she learned responsibility for others than herself. She learned that regardless of the weather you must still care for those you have the stewardship of. There are no "days off" just because you don't feel like being a horse owner that day. She learned that for every hour of fun you have there are days of hard slogging work you must do first.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she learned not to be afraid of getting dirty and that appearances don't matter to most of the breathing things in the world we live in. Horses do not care about designer clothes, jewelry, pretty hairdos or anything else we put on our bodies to try to impress others. What a horse cares about are your abilities to work within his natural world, he doesn't care if you're wearing \$80.00 jeans while you do it.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she learned about sex and how it can both enrich and complicate lives. She learned that it only takes one time to produce a baby, and the only way to ensure babies aren't produced is not to breed. She learned how babies are planned, made, born and, sadly, sometimes die before reaching their potential. She learned how sleepless nights and trying to out-smart a crafty old broodmare could result in getting to see, as non-horse owning people rarely do, the birth of a true miracle.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she understands the value of money. Every dollar can be translated into bales of hay, bags of feed or farrier visits. Purchasing non-necessities during lean times can mean the difference between feed and good care, or neglect and starvation. She has learned to judge the level of her care against the care she sees provided by others and to make sure her standards never lower, and only increase as her knowledge grows.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she has learned to learn on her own. She has had teachers that cannot speak, nor write, nor communicate beyond body language and reactions. She has had to learn to "read" her surroundings for both safe and unsafe objects, to look for hazards where others might only see a pretty meadow. She has learned to judge people as she judges horses. She looks beyond appearances and trappings to see what is within.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she has learned sportsmanship to a high degree. Everyone that competes fairly is a winner. Trophies and ribbons may prove someone a winner, but they do not prove someone is a horseman. She has also learned that some people will do anything to win, regard-less of who it hurts. She knows that those who will cheat in the show ring will also cheat in every other aspect of their life and are not to be trusted.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she has self-esteem and an engaging personality. She can talk to anyone she meets with confidence, because she has to express herself to her horse with more than words. She knows the satisfaction of controlling and teaching a 1000 pound animal that will yield willingly to her gentle touch and ignore the more forceful and inept handling of those stronger than she is. She holds herself with poise and professionalism in the company of those far older than herself.

Because my daughter grew up with horses she has learned to plan ahead. She knows that choices made today can effect what happens five years down the road. She knows that you cannot care for and protect your investments without savings to fall back on. She knows the value of land and buildings, and that caring for your vehicle can mean the difference between easy travel or being stranded on the side of the road with a four horse trailer on a hot day.

When I look at what she has learned and what it will help her become, I can honestly say that I haven't "wasted" a penny on providing her with horses. I only wish that all children had the same opportunities to learn these lessons from horses before setting out on the road to adulthood.