

Trials of a Horse Crazy Thirty-something Thirty-year-olds Don't Bounce!

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“Perhaps I should go back to reading. Reading’s a pretty good hobby.” I’m thinking this from my vantage point conveniently located on the side of a 14-hand-tall Arabian horse, who is currently running with abandon but without regard to her passenger, hanging in such an awkward and unconventional position. “At least she’s small, and the ground doesn’t look THAT hard,” I think, watching the solid red clay whiz by beneath me, “I’m only about two feet up at this point. How bad can it be?”

It was the classic scenario: we were having a cantering lesson, which was a bit rough given my steed’s tender age of 4 combined with the fact that I’d only been back to riding for a few months after a long absence. We had been cantering along, only slightly out of control, when Molly (the snorting, raging steed who looked so benign just one hour ago) decided that she was tired of going straight and thought turning left would be fun. She executed a very neat 135 degree turn...and I didn’t. So here I hang, my left leg over the horse’s back, my right foot awkwardly still in the stirrup, trying to hold onto the saddle and pull the horse to a stop at the same time. Of course I can’t grab her mane—it’s her best feature and I can’t risk pulling it out!

My trainer is yelling at me, “It’s ok! You can do it!” and I wonder momentarily if she is speaking to me or the mare. From my perspective, I’m thinking that this is anything BUT ok. After various un-publishable thoughts, I determine that there is no way that I’m going to be pulling my considerably-sized self back up onto this horse whether she stops or not, so there’s only one other direction to go. I let go.

I discovered something very disturbing about the time that I turned 30: that’s when the warrantee runs out. When I turned 30, I suddenly needed a lot more chap stick, lotion, and Ibuprofen than I did just the day before. How does that happen?? Anyway, today I discovered that 30-somethings fall much harder than their 13-year old selves did...especially if the 30-something self weighs roughly twice what they did at 13. The ground shudders as I fall. Animals scream.

Babies cry. For my part, I'm just trying to convince my lungs to start working again, but they've decided to take up reading instead. Molly's at the other end of the arena, peacefully eating grass and looking completely unconcerned as to my fate. Mares!

My trainer, Mi...oh, I should change her name to protect her innocence. We'll call her...Lichelle. Lichelle arrives at my resting place, asking if I'm ok. This strikes me as a silly question. I start to say, "[various unpublishable epithets] no, I'm not ok. Call my husband to come get me. I'm going back to reading as a hobby." What came out was "AAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGHHHHH," as my lungs are still contemplating War and Peace. Apparently, "AAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGHHHHH" in trainer-speak means "I'm quite well, thank you. Shall we give it another go, then?" because the next thing I know, she's standing with my horse at the mounting block.

She must be out of her mind, I think. My lungs have finally decided to come out of their early retirement, so I slowly and painstakingly extricate myself from the ground and give her my best Are-You-Out-Of-Your-Mind???-I'm-Not-Getting-Back-On-That-Horse look, which she returns with her best I-See-Your-'Are-You-Out-Of-Your-Mind-I'm-Not-Getting-Back-On-That-Horse'-look,-But-You're-Getting-Back-On-This-Horse-Whether-You-Like-It-Or-Not look. I cast a curse or two as I drag myself up onto the mounting block. Suddenly my 14 hand horse is as hard to get on as an elephant, but somehow I manage it. I also somehow manage to finish the lesson, cantering sufficiently to get my torturer to release me, and limp to the car to drive home.

Thank God I didn't drive the stick shift today, because I can barely lift my right foot to gas or brake, and I can barely lift my left leg at all. The pain in my right hip is immense, and every time I move, I feel a horrible pulling there. By the time I drive 35 minutes to get home, I'm absolutely stiff and the adrenaline that had gotten me from the barn to my car is now gone. When I get back to my apartment, I almost cry with relief that the space closest to our building is open. I try to get out of the car and almost fall. I am incapable of walking at this point, but luckily I have my cell phone so I call my Knight in Shining Armor, Gr....oh, I guess I should change his name to protect him, too. We'll call him...Leg. I call Leg, and when he answers I say, "I'm in the parking space behind the building. Come get me and bring a cane." Apparently

in husband-speak this means, “Come out on the back porch, which has no outlet to the parking lot, and stare at me.” He comes out with a somewhat dumbfounded look on his face—I haven’t quite finished his training yet, so following directions is sometimes a challenge. In my best exasperated tone I snap, “I can’t WALK. Come OUT here, and BRING A CANE!!!!”

I spend the next several days in the bathtub and go through enough Epsom salts to season stew for all four of the armed forces combined. I don’t remember falling off as hurting so much! The last time I fell off was...probably 11 years ago at least. Back then, I’d hit the ground and bounce right back onto my horse. I had grown up with horses, but had to give them up for almost 10 years until I decided that I could, in fact, “afford” a horse again. It turns out that while your brain remembers a lot about riding, your body needs a few refresher courses! I’ve been trying to come up with some sort of cute name for people like me, but Horse-Crazy Thirty-Something Who Gave Up Horses For A Long Time And Are Trying To Learn To Ride Again is kind of long, and HOCRS doesn’t quite capture the right spirit. I’ll keep working on it for the next installment. For now, to my fellow Horse Crazy Thirty-Somethings, I leave you with the following advice: two feet IS a long way to fall, and Wal-mart has those half-gallon cartons of Epsom salts for \$.99.