

Horses: A Mother's Perspective

A horse-owning life is demanding and expensive, but this mother revels in the rewards.

By Ginny Therrien

“Gee, horses are expensive. How do you do it?” This question has come my way more than once over the years. People are curious how a single parent on a limited salary can provide a horsey lifestyle for her daughter. There's no easy answer, other than the old saying about the will and the way. Looking back now, I can say without doubt that any sacrifices I made to provide horses to Monica were way more than worth it.

Right Out of the Gate

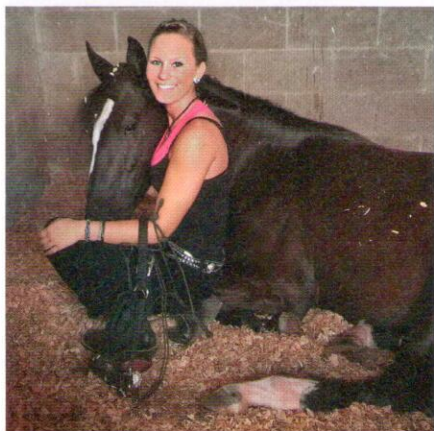
Horses have always been a part of my daughter's life. When Monica was a year old, in 1996, I managed the Rancho Oso Camping Resort in Santa Ynez, California. Monica would gather carrots from the fridge, pull on her boots, then climb happily into her stroller to travel down the winding road from our house to the barn to visit the horses.

She also rode with me out on the trail, plopped in front of me in the saddle until the rocking motion put her to sleep and her head thumped into my chest.

Just before her second birthday, she announced she wanted to ride by herself. I told her she could ride Dale, our 30-year-old gelding, but to do so she'd have to wear “cowgirl panties,” not a diaper. My logic worked—it was instant potty training, and I watched with pride as she rode off (a short distance) all on her own.

When Monica was 4, we moved to Indiana, where she began participating in leadline classes and continued to love all things horse. While other children watched kiddie shows, Monica sat on the saddle in the family room, watching Clinton Anderson train horses on RFD-TV. His movements and the horses' responses fascinated her.

She also had a full set of toy horses,



The author's daughter with Quinn, a BLM filly she trained for a mustang contest.

complete with barn, corrals, tack, trailer, hay bales, and stall-cleaning tools. Sometimes I'd overhear her as she positioned the horses in the corral for a “training session.”

“Time for longeing for respect!” She knew many of the clinician's catchphrases by heart.

Opportunities Galore

We moved again in 2001, this time to Oregon, where Monica, now in the first grade, joined 4-H's “Adventurer” program. Over the next few years she became competitive in showmanship, equitation, trail, jumping, and gaming patterns.

She also participated on the Oregon High School Equestrian Team, qualifying for state-level competition in Redmond, Oregon, with both her horses, Paint gelding Diamonds4Cash and Quarter Horse mare Caviada Dbl Flit Run.

By her junior and senior years, Monica was juggling school, homework, employment, 4-H, and the equestrian team. I thought that was more than enough, but Monica jumped at yet another opportunity. She applied and was accepted to train BLM yearlings

through the Teens and Oregon Mustangs program.

In the program's Youth & Yearling competition, entries are judged on body conditioning of the young horse, showmanship, and performance on an in-hand trail course. As a junior, Monica placed third in this competition with the filly Paisley. The following year, with filly Quinn, she won first place.

Yes, the horse thing has been expensive. But it has enriched Monica's life, teaching her self-motivation, responsibility, teamwork, and skills to last a lifetime. She's made wonderful friends, plus kept herself on the honor roll every year through high school. Moreover, aside from scholarship funds, money Monica earned training horses for clients helped to pay for her freshman year at Tillamook Bay Community College.

This year, Monica was invited to spend the summer on an internship at the historic FitzGerald Farms training center in Yamhill, Oregon. After we packed the rig with tack, accessories and suitcases, Monica and I loaded her two horses, then I hugged her goodbye.

With a lump in my throat, I watched her pull away, thinking of that first time, years ago, when she rode off on her own. Now she was driving off on her own, with a cheery wave and a beautiful smile.

Yes, no question: The horses have been worth it. □

Ginny Therrien now lives in Borrego Springs, California. Previously, she lived in Cloverdale, Oregon, where for 13 years she volunteered as a 4-H horse leader in Tillamook County.

Have a poignant, humorous, or educational story to share? E-mail jfmeyer@aimmedia.com; 675-word maximum.