Cowboy Mission: The Best Sermons are Lived...Not Preached

by Charles Thomas Sherf &
Barbara Lee Sherf



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Essays by
Charles Thomas Sherf
& Barbara Lee Sherf

Edited by Karen Horowitz, Barbara Sherf
and Kathleen Sherf

INTRODUCTION

I am not an award-winning equestrian. I am an average rider who likes to stick to the trails, instead of practicing maneuvers and jumps in the ring. While I know how to ride English and Western-style, it is the latter that I prefer; I am just a good old cowgirl trying to make a go of it. As of this writing, I am 46 years of age and my father is turning 80. We have had many great rides over the years, but I suppose it's the dramatic rides we tend to write about, and so my essays reflect some of that drama.

The concept for this collection grew out of an article I originally wrote for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* about riding horses with my father, Charles T. Sherf (or Charlie), and the tales he would tell as we rode weekly over a three-year period. The newspaper piece prompted him to get out his old black and white composition books and write about his tales. In July 2008, I had a riding accident that sidelined me for months, giving me time to heal, to transcribe his stories and reflect on my own.

Even if you have never been on a horse, please travel this trail with us. On our journey, we will look at listening to animals, learning the power of primal communication, and discovering what it really takes to get back in the saddle after a fall. We invite you to put your foot in the stirrups and come along for this adventure!

A Special thanks to Mark Tratenberg, Wyatt's owner, who made our weekly rides possible; Dr. Thomas Fitzpatrick, a dear neighbor and friend who co-founded the Philadelphia Saddle Club and has taught me a thing or two about animals, people, and relationships.

To my Cousin Kathleen Sherf (one of Buzzy's three children) for her careful editing. My appreciation extends to Diane Garvey and all of the Philadelphia Saddle Club members, as well as my barn buddies at Monastery Stables.

Thanks, also, to my business partner, D. Mike Smith, for putting this book together. Finally, this book was made possible by the capable editing, image scanning and re-touching and coaching by my mentor and best friend, Karen Horowitz (aka k.h. krena).

Thank you, Krena, for inspiring me to pull together "**Cowboy Mission: The Best Sermons are Lived…Not Preached.**"

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Chapter 1: *Riding with my Father*
Tall Tales in the Saddle
by Barbara L. Sherf
(published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on July 23, 2007)

Despite not smoking, my soon-to-be, 79-year-old father, Charlie, is the quintessential "Marlborough Man." Dad grew up on a farm in Maple Shade, New Jersey with two brothers and two sisters, where he developed a lifelong love of horses and learned about "the power of the almighty buck."

He talks about working 60-hour weeks: picking tomatoes, transporting them by wagon with a team of mules to Campbell's Soup, and earning $30 which he turned over to his mother, who gave him $10 back. The big bucks came on Saturday nights under the lights at the Cowtown Rodeo or another local rodeo, where he would receive $5 for a mere eight second ride on a bull or horse -- pocketing the entire booty

Of his four children, I was the only one infected by Dad's love of horses. I remember many Saturdays hanging around a barn in Pennypack Park, cleaning a horse and taking turns riding the trails. I rode through high school, but became too busy with college, career, and marriage to ride again with any regularity. Some folks get red convertibles in mid-life; I got back into riding horses. In October of 2005, I joined the Philadelphia Saddle Club, where for a relatively low monthly fee, I could ride any of five horses as much as

I wanted in the beautiful Wissahickon Valley section of Fairmount Park. Soon, Dad was coming to the stable to see me ride. He was happy that I had gotten back in the saddle, but he was also frustrated, being on the sidelines, sitting on the fence.

I started snooping around Monastery Stables in Mount Airy and found a like-minded soul, who wanted his horse ridden a bit more, particularly during the week. Dad met Mark and his horse Wyatt, shared a few rodeo stories, and the deal was done. Since then, we have been riding together telling tall tales once a week. After a long ride, we would frequent a local pub for a beer and a sandwich and, of course, more reminising about his youth and the farm.

On one of our outings, Dad shared the story of the happiest day in his life. I thought it might be his wedding day or the birth of his first child, but no, it was the day he and his buddy, Charlie Pfluger, rode on Pfluger's horse to a dude ranch to look at a horse for Dad.

At the age of 15, Dad had managed to save up $75 and got a deal on a one-eyed horse whom he named *Paint.* He didn't even have the extra $5 for an army saddle, so he rode home from Moorestown to Maple Shade bareback. He no longer had to ride the farm horses or mules; he had a horse of his own, and he was in love with him. He still is.

I've been urging Dad to write down the stories, and here is an interesting twist to the *Paint* story that Dad later shared in writing. "After a lot of biting and scratching it became evident to me that we brought other things home from Ray Hinkson's Dude Ranch besides pure, unadulterated pleasure. *Paint* had a flea infestation."

He then described how the pair treated *Paint* with kerosene and hid him in the far side of the barn, hoping Uncle John would not find out and "send us all packing."

The stories continued with one about how he and Charlie Pfluger went to Willow Grove Park for a week to ride in a rodeo.

"I'll never forget the business lessons I learned that summer. They had a nice arena in Willow Grove Park, and the rodeo organizers promised Charlie Pfluger and I good money for evening performances. They even gave us meal tickets, fed our horses, and provided us with free carnival rides. It was too good to be true. We were supposed to get $300 a piece for the week, which was a lot of money in those days. Well, at the end of the week we all got nice fat checks, and they all bounced. Never did catch those scoundrels."

Thanks, Dad, for sharing with me your love of horses, the weekly rides and the precious stories. Now stop your yackin' and let's ride!

Chapter 2: *Hard Times Builds Strong Character* by Charles T. Sherf

I was born November 27, 1928, just before the Stock Market Crash and survived the Great Depression. I think that except for a few bumps in the road, I had a pretty nice life. Those times instilled in us a sense of thriftiness and family togetherness. They call me Charlie Sherf, and this is my story.

My father, Bob Sherf, was an orphan who never really knew his family roots. But if a boy ever wanted a hero, he was it. He was tall, handsome, good-natured and, because of the hard times, he had a strong sense of character. Somehow Dad made his way from a farm for needy children in Virginia to the big city of Philadelphia. My father wrote to the farm owner some years later, a Mr. Richardson, in Falls Church, Virginia, to tell him of his good fortune: a nice wife and five healthy children – three boys and two girls. Helen, Robert (Buzzy), Charles, Tommy, and Lorraine (Rainey). As of this writing, Helen and Buzzy have passed away. As an insight, Buzzy got his name from our oldest sister, Helen, who had a tough time saying brother. It's funny how nicknames take hold.

Our father always had a car, because he would routinely be laid off from his job in Philadelphia. So he, like hundreds of other men in the hard Depression times, could get around with the car and pick up some spare work. I guess we were in the upper echelon of the poor people in Maple Shade, because he had that car. The

car also enabled us to go on Sunday road trips. I can still remember one very memorable trip in the 1930s. A large zeppelin called the Hindenburg crashed in flames in North Jersey and we took a long ride to see what was left of it. Gas was relatively inexpensive in those days and we got some education and relaxation from those car rides. We always visited our Mom's parents in Philadelphia on holidays or my dear Aunt Betty and her gang of children.

My mother, Helen Rice, came from a rather large family. Her father worked for the railroad. My mom said that when she first got married she was apprehensive about moving to the country, with all of the "woods and water." After a while she grew to love it. I don't know how my parents met, but they had a great marriage in spite of the hard times – or maybe because of it.

My siblings and I were all born in Philadelphia, with the exception of Rainey who was born in Maple Shade, New Jersey. We lived across from Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. Later we rented a house at the corner of Greenwood and Woodlawn in Maple Shade.

We had a baseball field of our own and at least 10 acres of woods and a stream to take a dip in during the hot summer – sans bathing suits and no girls allowed.

Dad worked for a butter and egg distributor in Philadelphia. We had a lot of chickens and one of my

earliest jobs was to ride to Collins Feed Store on my bike to pick up corn to feed them. I was no more than seven years old. We had a sign out front "Eggs for Sale." We always had plenty of chickens and eggs. We never went hungry.

My Mom had four brothers and they worked for the railroad and never got married. They usually had a lot of spending money and often gave us a quarter or half dollar at Christmas. Mom, who was very frugal, made us turn it over to her on the way home. I guess I never had a whole quarter to myself until I went to work at the age of 12.

Typically after work, I remember Dad would eat real fast, or sometimes even skip his supper, and we would all play baseball, even my Mom and older sister Helen, until dusk set in.

I didn't realize that we were poor at the time, and I drove my mother half crazy begging for a red bike when I was around six years old. Well, come Christmas morning there it was, a big beautiful 26" shiny red bike purchased for $25 from the Sears & Roebuck Company. I'm sure she paid for it in monthly installments for some time to come. They purchased the bike so I would grow into it and attached wooden blocks on the pedals so I could reach them early on and remove them and ride that bike for years to come. My brother Buzzy never yearned for a bike, but Tommy would jump on it and ride sidesaddle. He was, and still is, very physically coordinated.

As poor as we were, we had great fun going to the movies for five cents a child every Saturday afternoon with our older sister, Helen, in charge. I remember eating Good-N-Plenty licorice candy, and still have a taste for licorice to this day.

Dad, who worked six-and-a-half days a week spent Saturday afternoons renewing his wedding vows, I suppose.

When I was about 12 years old, Dad had managed to save up enough money to put a down payment on a house on the other side of town. The house, on West Main Street, sat on an acre and a half of ground near the Pennsauken Creek. I think it cost $1,400. I remember taking a $20 bill to the post office every month and getting a money order to pay the mortgage. We still went to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which was a short ride to see our old friends. On one side, the McBrides had a tennis court that was partially built on our property. If you worked like mad to haul clay to the tennis court you could play occasionally. But who wanted to play tennis when there were all sorts of animals and adventure on the nearby Pfluger Farm?

Charlie Pfluger and I were quite friendly from our first day in school and one day he invited me to his farm; 125-acres filled with mules, work horses, calves, cows and chickens. Who wanted to play tennis or go to the swimming hole with all of those animals nearby? Not I!

Chapter: 3 *A History of the Farm and the People* by Charles T. Sherf

Originally, Mrs. Pfluger, "a great lady," put up a thousand dollars for the farm. Charlie's Uncle John and Ed Tiver, also put up a thousand dollars, and that's how the farm got started around the turn of the century. Uncle Ed and John, along with Mr. and Mrs. Pfluger, were all Tivers and lived and worked that farm their entire lives.

Charlie Pfluger Sr.

Charlie Pfluger's father, Charles Sr., was a real gentleman who always treated me well. He loved his wife and family, and diligently drove a fuel truck for Gulf Oil Company in Woodbury, New Jersey in addition to working the farm. Charlie Sr. taught me how to hunt the plentiful game we had on our two farms. He also loaned me my first shotgun to shoot.

Mr. Pfluger was usually working hard as he was a no-nonsense person. A few times a year he took Charlie and me to the shore where we rented a large boat and went deep-sea fishing. I also remember him taking us to a sportsmen's show in Philadelphia one year. These great times I will never forget. Later in life, Mr. Pfluger moved into management at Gulf Oil. I was already working at *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, but he got my younger brother, Tommy, a job at Gulf Oil.

John Tiver – The Boss Man

John Tiver was an old school farmer making a good living at farming. He was a bit of a loner who seemed to care for his livestock more than his help. John was very sensible. He never got married, and as far as I knew, never had a girlfriend. John worked seven days a week, 12 hours a day as long as I knew him. He worked hard and expected his help to do the same.

Uncle John kept at least a half dozen cows that had calves each year. He did not sell the excess milk they produced, because according to law, it would have to be pasteurized and required that the barn be kept scrupulously clean. He didn't have the time or money to be bothered with that. But we all drank that milk and never got sick.

I distinctly remember my job in my high school days. I would get to the farm about 4:00 p.m. and Uncles John and Ed were usually at the farm near the Colestown Cemetery. I would talk to Mrs. Pfluger for a little while and then bring in four to six cows from a large pasture. I would feed the cows and draft animals. As the cows were contentedly eating, I would open the gates to the calf pen and the calves would nurse voraciously for about an hour. Then I would strip out the remaining milk by hand and use it for the house or give it to the chickens. Again, the milk would have been illegal to sell because it was not state approved.

I clearly remember one day going into the barn and noticed that somehow one of the "monk" calves caught his head in a small fence and hung itself. I ran to the house and Uncle John happened to be nearby and contacted a local butcher in Maple Shade. The calf was still warm so the meat was good. The calf was basically dead, so his throat was cut to drain all of the blood out, and the meat was sold as milk-fed veal. This was during the war and meat was scarce then, and a black market business was born. The butcher then sold some of our calves at premium price as milk-fed veal. I think it was a little shady, but I never said a word.

Anyhow, I was paid one dollar at the end of the week for my two hours a day with the cows. I usually worked on Saturdays all day and we rode our horses on long trips around Cherry Hill and Delaware Township on Sundays. Those Sunday rides in the fall made all the work during the week worthwhile.

Ed Tiver

Ed Tiver was Uncle John's younger brother. The machines were often useless in the wet fields and back breaking jobs were frequently given to the young ones. Uncle John would hire a crew of us to "help out." This was really a two-man job.

If you worked with Uncle Ed you were lucky as he was a pleasant bachelor of about 40. In his youth he must have been somewhat wild; he told stories of drinking and gambling. Uncle John, who did not pursue either of those endeavors, was in charge despite the fact that we considered him a tough taskmaster who probably saved the ship. I noticed that Uncle Ed took no wages, but in the fall, when we were not as busy on the farm, he would go out for a weekend of fun and frolic. On those weekends, he would get $50 or $100 from John, who handled all of the finances. Occasionally, Uncle John would get cleaned up and go into Camden for the evening. He always returned home the same night though. A strong hard worker and a sort of hero type, we felt pity for Uncle Ed as he never got married. I feel he would have made a good father. I watched Uncle Ed Tiver suffer the ravages of cancer and die at the age of 46. Incidentally, Uncle John died a few years later at the age of 51 from a heart attack. Shortly after that I left the farm to serve an apprenticeship with *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* – taking all those memories from my farm days.

When Uncle John died, my longtime childhood friend, Charlie Pfluger took over the farm to get in that year's crops. Charlie Pfluger and his Uncle Bill managed the farm that year. Charlie was about 18-years-old. When the farm was eventually sold, our beautiful playground became a housing development known as Alden Park. The original farmhouse is still there, in the midst of the newer homes. I see it at times and become extremely nostalgic remembering the pleasant times there.

I loved the people and I loved the farm. We had six mules, two workhorses, a half dozen cows and heifers, and two bulls. We rode them all for free. Charlie and I loved the riding practice we had when no one was around. I can't understand why we never got seriously hurt riding in the barnyard. We must have been in pretty good physical condition with all of the farm work.

In 1955 I married Barbara Smith from Philadelphia. We met at a dance. We raised our family of four: Karen, Patrice, Barbie, and Kevin in Philadelphia. Charlie and I did not see much of each other after about 30 years of age.

Frank Beatty

Charlie Pfluger and I met a professional rider and blacksmith who lived in Maple Shade. His name was Frank Beatty. Frank and his wife, Joyce, lived on Anna Avenue. They lived next door to Mr. And Mrs. Straub, their in-laws. They had at least six horses on approximately a half-acre of ground just two blocks south of Main Street in Maple Shade. There were about ten other horses in those days in that town. Frank Beatty, the Straubs, and the Jobes, who owned the butcher shop nearby and maybe a few others, would take four-hour rides around the Cherry Hill area and Colestown. Frank had a carriage that looked like a small stagecoach, and someone would be in the back of the carriage with the 6-month old baby. They were great rides. Sometimes a few other riders would join us and then leave.

The Cherry Hill Mall was a wooded area back then, and I recall a lot of good races on Chapel Avenue in Merchantville.

Elwood "Tiddly" Gibson

Elwood "Tiddly" Gibson was the son of Bill Gibson, whom I first met on the farm when I was about 13 or 14 years old. They lived near the farm and Bill Gibson worked the good team of mules, *Jack and Nancy*, almost exclusively. Bill was about 70-years-old and had raised something like 12 children on the Tiver farm.

Tiddly, his youngest son, was the only one left in that large mill house down by Pennsauken Creek. He got his nickname because as a child he was fond of playing the game Tiddly Winks. The two Gibsons that I knew both had violent tempers and I suspect they did not like John Tiver very much.

Charlie Pfluger and I, on the other hand, got along quite well with Tiddly, who happened to be black. We hunted a lot together and even though Elwood "Tiddly" was older than us by four years, we often helped him cut wood for his stove. Tiddly would only work about two days a week in the winter. We gave him some rabbit and pheasants, and he survived nicely. In the summer, Tiddly was a hard worker. For $5 each, my younger brother Tommy and I and the other young cowboys played a game of basketball on horseback; Shirts vs. Skins. The audience loved it. When the ten riders and horses got together for that

basketball game it was hard to tell who was on what team. Most of the time we were 'unhorsed' and fighting ferociously for possession of the ball. But the basket only counted if the rider made the shot from the horse's back. Often if an opponent was unseated and you were galloping toward his goal, he would hold your leg and try to unseat you. Tommy, who was a pretty good basketball player in school, would be positioned on his white pony near the goal and if one of us bigger guys got possession of the ball we would pass it to Tommy, who would usually make the shot. That trick usually triggered 'a free for all' with fists flying. Riders and horses in a heap on the ground! The spectators loved it and I remember being paid an extra $5 to stage a fight with Leon "Goof" Manchester of Paulsboro, New Jersey. The fight was staged but the bloody noses, I assure you, were real!

Another Tiddly Gibson story I can recall was when Charlie Pfluger and I were about 14 years old and rather skinny. Tiddly would wrestle us in the hot hay mound in the barn. Tiddly was about 20 years old and probably 180 pounds compared to our 130 pounds or so each. Tiddly's favorite trick was to get one of us in a headlock with one arm and fight off the other with his other arm. Well, Tiddly never took a bath and in the hot barn one did not want to be under that smelly armpit for too long. Charlie Pfluger and I often talked about trying to breath under that powerful armpit. Just getting loose took super human strength. We never complained to Tiddly, but we sure complained and compared notes to each other.

Chapter 4: *I Loved Those Mules*
by Charles Thomas Sherf

The Pfluger Farm was nice. Although like most teenagers, I did not appreciate it as much as I do looking back today. The days must have been special, because I remember them as if they were yesterday.

I'll probably never forget that first year on the farm when I was about 12-years-old. Charlie Pfluger was a veteran at driving mules and ranching cattle. I was a shy kid in those days, and meeting Charlie's family and all those splendid animals was pure heaven. Charlie had his own special mule named *Old Kate*. She was rumored to be 35 years old, and Charlie had been driving her for at least a half-dozen years. Charlie taught me how to hook *Old Kate* to a one-horse cultivator called a Ho-Harrow. It's hard to imagine allowing a young kid to tackle such a job now, and honestly, the whole thing frightened me at first -- but eventually I came to love *Old Kate*, the farm and the responsibility involved.

Charlie Pfluger graduated to an even larger one-eyed mule named *Tom*. We walked behind those two mules that first summer in our bare feet, initially for a cent and a half a row, later for 35 cents per hour, and the next year and all through high school for 50 cents an hour six days a week for the princely sum of $30 a week; $20 of which my mother took to help with the upkeep of our home. We never complained. It was actually a great feeling to be driving mules in the hot sun, picking

tomatoes, and having enough money to eventually buy my very own horse. Around that time, my Dad probably earned about $50 a week. Even in later life, the kids all contributed board money, and it was a good feeling to help out and earn our keep. Mom would give me back $10 dollars and that was a lot of money for a "mule skinner" who did not drink and was too shy to have a girlfriend.

We would follow those mules at approximately three miles per hour for ten hours in the hot sun, and the freshly harrowed ground felt good under our bare feet. When it was time to go back to school in the fall, our shoes would hardly fit us.

Tom, the one-eyed mule, was the biggest and probably the strongest. As the story goes — and Charlie Pfluger saw it happen about five years before I got to the farm — *Tom* had a mate named *Bell*, and she was larger than *Tom*, who was the largest I had seen up until that time; probably about 1600 pounds. On a very hot day those two mules were trying to pull a potato digger that should have been pulled by at least three mules. *Tom's* mate, *Bell*, died in the field from heat exhaustion. I'm glad I did not see that.

Another mule team up the ladder was a young team made up of *Jack* and *Dolly*. That team was the choice to pull a wagonload of 100 baskets of tomatoes out of the field. *Dolly* was the prettiest mule I ever saw and *Jack* the strongest pound-for-pound, for although he was

rather skinny, he always gave his best. We grew about 60 acres of tomatoes that year. We had to sort them and put them on the truck to take to Campbell's Soup in Camden, New Jersey. We harrowed with them the following year as well, and my little brother, Tommy, later came to the farm and enjoyed being around that team.

The best mule team was *Jack* and *Nancy* who were big, strong, and fairly young. In the early spring, they were a handful to master. There was a farmer named Downs nearby. Rumor had it that he had the best mules in Jersey. About five years later, Mr. Downs retired, and Uncle John inherited those mules. I drove them and they were nice, but in some respects, I thought *Jack* and *Nancy* were better. But then again, what does a 'city boy' from Maple Shade know about mules?

I can never forget an incident occurring with *Jack* and *Nancy* that could have cost me my job and my life. We had a rubber-tired wagon with a large load of hay on it. I was about 16-years-old and barely into puberty. Uncle John wanted me to take the load from our Maple Shade farm about four miles away to the Colestown Cemetery Farm to be put in the barn there, but he was concerned about the momentum these mules would gather going down the steep grade on Mill Road heading to Route 38. I thought I could get the job done and started off without his permission.

I remember this incident well, because I had a girlfriend named Elaine and I stopped at her house to say hello on the way over, and maybe to show off a little. Uncle John was right; I underestimated the momentum that the load carried. I was up on the top of the load driving the mules, and I could not make them hold the wagon back. My heart was in my throat. By the time the team arrived at Route 38, they were at a full gallop, and I had serious thoughts about jumping off. Fortunately for all involved, there was very little traffic that day and when the team shot across the road and started up the steep incline with about two tons of hay aboard, they almost came to a halt. I jumped down and led the mules the rest of the way. I learned my lesson about showing off and disobeying . If a vehicle had been coming down that road today they would have been dead meat. There is a little traffic light there now. Sometimes I have nightmares about that trip. I never told Uncle John either. Neither did the mules.

The mule, *Nancy*, was very strong and sure footed, but if the load got heavy, she would quit. *Jack*, on the other hand, was a perfect match for her, and he would never quit. They were both large and agile mules, but *Jack* had a clubfoot, causing him to walk with an uneven gate, giving him sore shoulders. If I had to choose a single mule, it would have been *Nancy*. But when she quit, *Jack* could not pull the load himself as much as he had tried. I grew fond of them as a team and came to value the importance of teamwork.

In about my fourth year of apprenticeship on the farm, Charlie Pfluger and I graduated to riding. Charlie Pfluger's Uncle John said that we could use the horses instead of the mules to cultivate the fields. Uncle John did not like the idea, but he agreed that the horses would walk faster and get more done. Using those horses was a little scary, because they were not used much and wanted to run. Charlie's horse, *Dan*, was spooked the first half-hour and ran across Church Road and jumped the cemetery fence. The cemetery is still there, and the harrow caught on the fence, must have given *Dan* an awful jolt as it stopped him cold. Of course, the black horse I was using went berserk and also tried to run, but I got hold of his bridle and was able to hold him back. When Uncle John found out, the fact that Charlie was the only boy in their family and apparent heir to the farm kept him from getting fired. I'm not sure why I didn't get fired, but I didn't. Another close call.

Chapter 5: Lessons Learned and Questions Considered From a Runaway Horse

by Barbara L. Sherf

It is nearly 4:00 am. Despite the hour, I cannot sleep following a runaway horse incident yesterday. I toss and turn, trying to analyze what happened and what, if anything, I can do to make sure that it doesn't happen again. The conclusion is equally tormenting: there was little I could have done differently, and the same scenario could easily occur again. Horses are big strong animals. I am human. In life and work sometimes things happen that you cannot control, and they can happen again and again.

The Risk Factor and Group Dynamics

There were three of us riding and I think we all learned a key lesson in group dynamics – the hard way. I took out *Buddy*, the "gentle soul" in the Philadelphia Saddle Club, because he had not been out in a while, and he recently had his hooves trimmed and new shoes put on. Of late, *Buddy* had gotten the reputation of being "lame," and I wanted to dispel this theory and stereotype. *Buddy* clearly wanted both the attention and a ride.

Jane rode *Madison*, a newer, spirited horse. I had never ridden with Jane or *Madison* before. Diane and *Dakota*, longtime riding buddies, rounded out the group. We had never ridden together before, and the horses seemed nervous and a bit ornery.

Out of Control

About halfway out from the lovely Monastery Stables on Kitchens Lane in West Mount Airy, we got the horses into a trot, and then a canter. We ride where the Indians rode in the Wissahickon Valley, with its lovely hills, rocky trails, and deeply forested woods.

Life was good, or so I thought. We carefully made our way towards a bike path near Lincoln Drive and managed to maneuver over the bridge toward a trail that I had been to before. As we made our way up a steep incline, *Madison* started racing up a gravel hill; there was no holding him back. *Dakota* followed suit and finally "good ole *Buddy*" joined in the race.

It was a "neck in neck" race in which nobody wanted to clear the finish line. At the top of the hill was a six-foot wooden gate across the gravel trail to keep out motor vehicles. On the other side was pure blacktop. In a flash, two scenarios crossed my mind; neither option seemed desirable. The first was that the horses would try to jump the gate with rider in tow; with the likely outcome of horse and rider suffering serious if not life-threatening injuries. The second scenario was that the other horses and riders would stop short, and one of us would be ejected over the gate, tumbling onto the blacktop on the other side. This indeed, was not a pretty scene.

If I had had a few more yards to think clearly, I might have jumped off the horse and tried to roll into the

hedges, but time was not on my side. Upon reaching the gate, all three horses came to an abrupt halt and it seems like a miracle that nobody was thrown off. We were all quite shaken up, and so were the horses. In life and business, how do you react when things get out of control? Do you jump off or stay on board and hope for the best? Do you look for obstacles to slow you down or do you try to jump over or around them?

The Irony

Ironically, my business partner and I gave a lecture earlier in the day to a local Rotary Club called, "Presentations and Networking for Success." I was attempting to changeover from a notable career as a writer and publicist to a professional speech coach and feeling a bit frustrated about how slowly the transition was going. Approximately fifty individuals were in the audience and we looked at this as a marketing opportunity; hoping that we would be able to enlist people for our upcoming half-day seminar about presentation and marketing skills.

As we left the room, we noticed that most of the fliers we had put out on the tables for our upcoming seminar had been left behind: not a great confidence builder, for sure. Yet, we had ten individuals who had signed on willing to take the opportunity and get on board with our program regarding their need to improvie their presentation and networking skills.

With ten client prospects committed, I figured there would be cancellations. I knew that often people wanted to improve themselves, but were afraid of the risk. How do you face risks in life? I've always known that there was a risk in riding a horse, but that didn't stop me. What happens if I fall? Similarily, what happens if I fall short in business opportunities?

Know When To Fold

We were all a bit shaken, but made our way back to a trail that was pretty much all down hill. That didn't stop *Buddy*. He was really wound up, and the "out of control" feeling surfaced again. Somewhere along the way, I made the decision to dismount. In talking to experienced riders, I was told I did the right thing. "As soon as that thought crosses your mind, you should make your move," was the sentiment echoed by a host of experienced riders.

From there, I walked *Buddy* about two miles back to the barn – a humiliating experience for sure, but one I needed to make for the horse's safety and for my own safety. In business and life, do you know when to fold and get out of a job or business dealing?

Getting Back in the Saddle

Once I got back to the stable, I saw my dear neighbor and friend, Dr. Thomas Fitzpatrick, Co-founder and President of the Philadelphia Saddle Club. I shared with him the disastrous experience. "It happens," was his reply. I was hoping for more, but "it happens"

pretty much summed up the experience – in life and work.

Instead of allowing "good ole *Buddy*" to go into the barn for his evening meal, I took him up to the ring to make him do something positive. I also needed to get back on him to boost my own self-confidence. While my upper body and lower back were "screaming" from our wild ride, I knew that it was the right thing to do. When things don't go your way in business, do you get back in the saddle and "giddyup" again or do you walk away?

My Passion

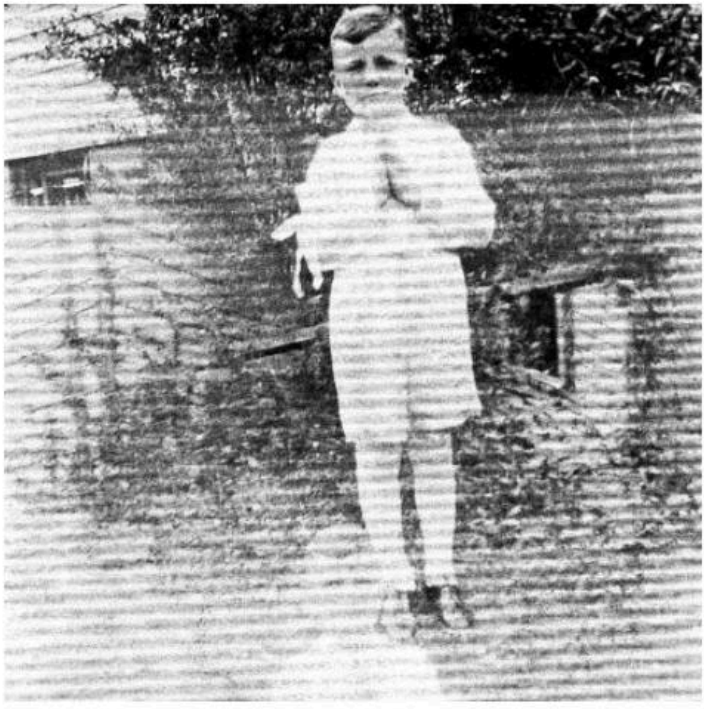
Once back home, I quickly wrote a check to The Philadelphia Saddle Club and sealed the envelope and my fate – good or bad – to ride for the next two months. I know, for the most part, I will continue to have some very positive experiences with these 1400-pound animals, and I know that the good riding experiences have clearly outweighed the bad. I fully intend to pursue my professional public relations work goals and my latest passion for speech coaching. Of the latter, I have fallen on several fronts and continue to dust myself off, but I will persevere and carry on. Will you? We all need to keep plugging away at our goals and passions.



Barbara Sherf - Summer of 2008

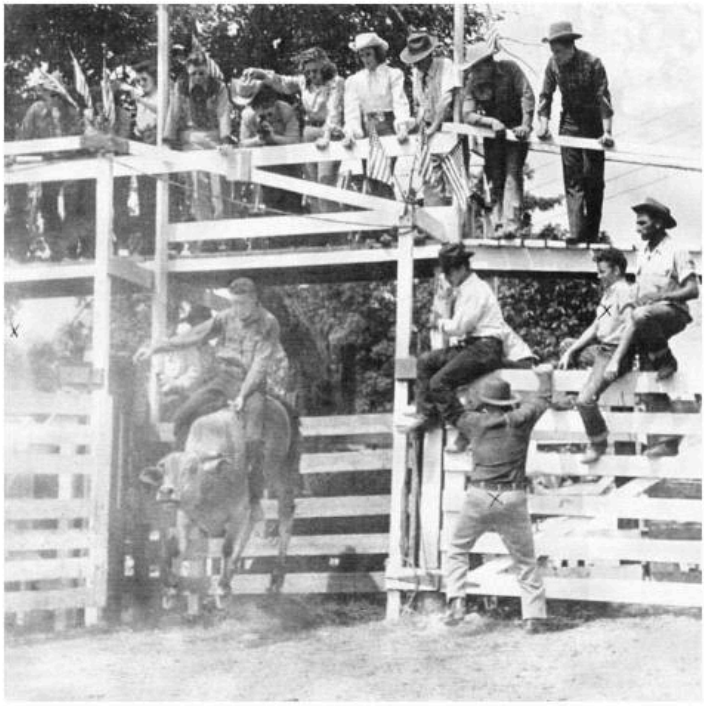


About 1935 at our original house on Greenwood Ave. in Maple Shade I am quite sure I was a virgin here. But a happy one!

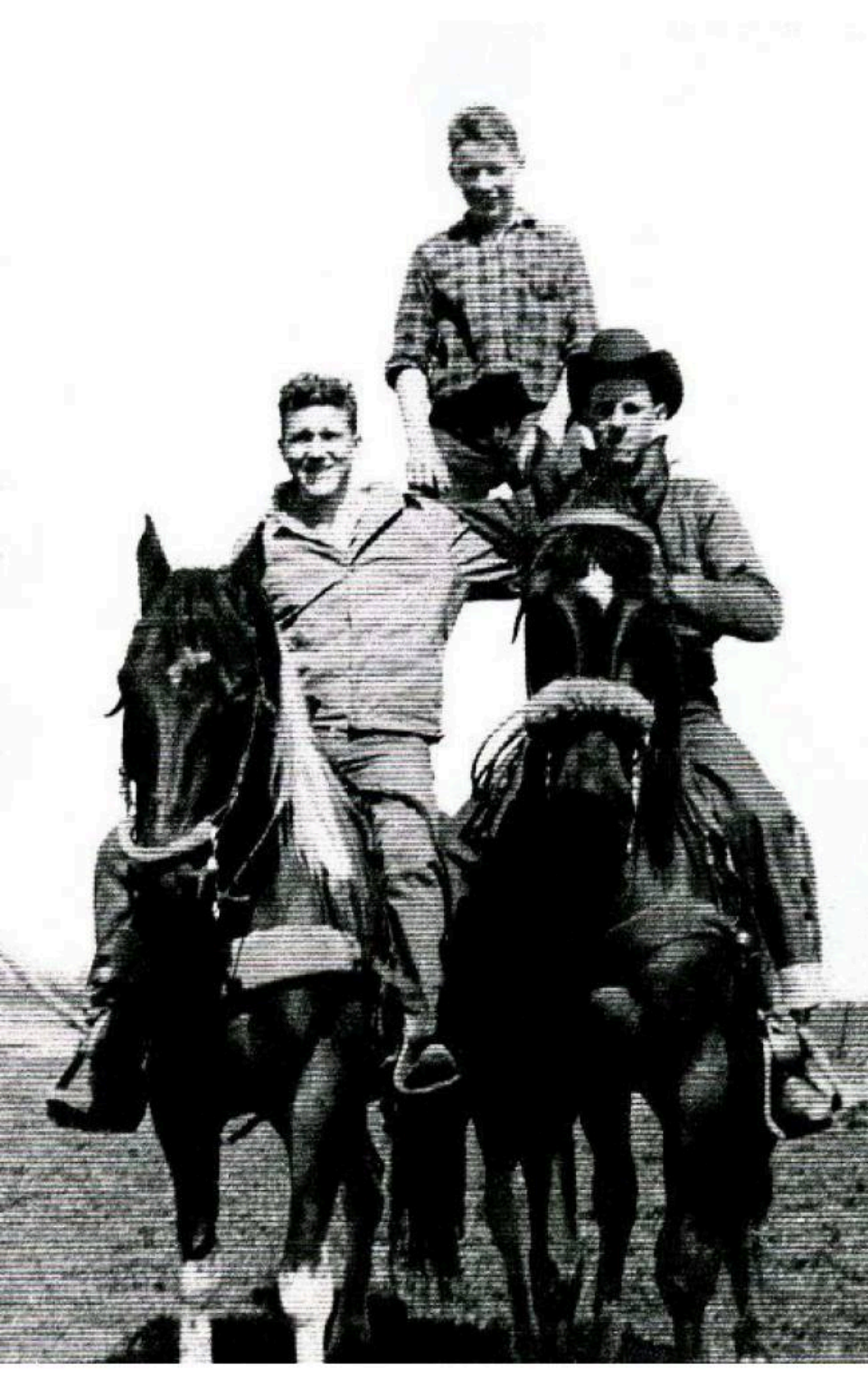




Charlie Pfluger and Charlie Sherf



From top to Bottom
Tommy Sherf, Chas Sherf
Old Paint, Chas Pfluger
and Star 1943. John
Tiver's farm 155 acres in
Maple Shade, N.J. Now a
housing development called
"Alden Park"





Charlie on "Paint"



Charlie hangs on for full 8 seconds!





Dr. Thomas Fitzpatrick
President of Philadelphia Saddle Club
and Barb at the Wissahickon Day Parade, 2007

Chapter 6: *Nasty Fleas and Nastier Rats*
by Charles T. Sherf

This one really gave me a scare. After a lot of biting and scratching, it became evident that we brought other things home from Ray Hinkson's Ranch besides pure, unadulterated pleasure. *Paint*, my horse, had fleas. The hair on poor *Paint's* rump was fast disappearing. Charlie and I figured if we did not correct the problem promptly and his Uncle John found out *Paint* was the source of fleas in the barn, old *Paint* and me would be sent packing.

We knew that all of the work animals and cows could get those fleas. Winter was coming on and we had to take desperate measures. We put *Paint* in the far corner of the barn. With the help of Frank Beatty, a professional horseman, and a trip to the veterinarian, we got clippers and trimmed most of *Paint's* hair off.

We bathed *Paint* daily, mostly with kerosene and water, and put a big horse blanket on him and kept him in isolation. Good thing nobody smoked at that barn or he and the whole place would have gone up in smoke. Luck was with us. Uncle John rarely visited that side of the barn. *Paint* had a cold, lonely winter, but all was fine in the spring. I learned a little more about horses and responsibility that long winter.

Oh Rats!

Rats on the farm were always a challenge. When I was about 16, Uncle John decided to build a new barn in Maple Shade. It was an interesting project, but also hard work starting with hauling gravel from the sand pit near our swimming hole. Charlie Pfluger and I would take a team of mules back to the sand pit and load an old wagon with gravel to be mixed into the barn foundation. We loaded that old dumpy wagon and dragged load after load to the new barn site. Uncles John and Ed Tiver and some other men cut down huge oak trees near our old swimming hole at Stoney's Creek.

Somehow they got those trees to the mill and made some great 6 and 12-inch oak boards for the frame. When the barn was complete it was beautiful and made us feel proud for being part of it. The barn was pretty modern and even had electricity, which caused another scare. We seldom ventured into the barn at night, but for some reason I went in about 10 o'clock and switched on the light. Lo and behold about 100 rats all tried to get out of a small hole in the wall near the manure pile. I froze in my tracks. Apparently the rats came out in the barn every night to get the undigested grain and corn out of the horse manure.

Needless to say, I hardly ever went in that barn again after dark.

Chapter 7: *What A Wild Ride! Thank You, My Friends*

by Barbara L. Sherf

Lying flat on my back after slipping on a patch of black ice outside the tack room where saddles and such are kept at Monastery Stables, I take an inventory of my injuries. I wondered who might be the first to find me. I remember whistling a happy tune after taking a peaceful wintry ride with two riding companions who were becoming fast friends. That day, we chatted about our lives, our loves, horses and humans. Then we rode in silence, along Forbidden Drive in glorious Fairmount Park, feeling connected to the horses and riders on many levels. We stopped, and one of the few walkers agreed to take a photo of the three of us. Kindred spirits.

After our snowy ride, all of us —the three riders and horses — returned safely to the stables. But where were they now? Both women, also in their 40s, had to put their saddles back too, so one or the other should spot me. A minute or so passes. I think about hollering, but had the wind knocked out of me. Someone surely will come. The route is also within sight of the Port-A-Potty. My head is clearing a bit. I re-take inventory. I can now recall the wonderful smells of distant wood fires and the crisp, cold air penetrating my nostrils that had started the day.

My left elbow is badly bruised, but not broken. My left wrist procured a possible sprain: still too tingly to tell. Miraculously, my left hand — held together with four screws following a nasty car accident two decades before — feels okay; not great, but okay. My left thigh suffers a contusion down the length of it. My left (bum) knee is sore, it is skinned and swelling. Finally, my lower back starts to ache and my ribs are bruised, but probably not broken. My mental status is clear and surprisingly calm. My personal inventory is complete.

Where are they? Another minute passes. I know Marianna Bauerlein will have to come looking, because I drove her to the barn. I had given her a lift since she owned a rear-wheel drive vehicle, and the roads were still icy. Halfway along the horse ride, she had returned the kindness by lending me her cashmere-lined gloves; my lightweight riding gloves were not doing the trick. We traded the gloves back and forth throughout the ride; an exchange of kindnesses among kindred spirits.

There are so many acts of kindness exchanged around this place, mostly by the women riders of all ages, sizes and from all walks of life. I was slowly getting to know them all and quickly getting to know Marianna, who lives in Mount Airy, and Diane Garvey, of Lansdale. The former had owned horses before, but had joined the club as a low-cost way to get her horseback riding fix while raising a teenage son. With two grown sons, Diane had taken up riding in April at the age of 48. What courage, I thought.

I was celebrating my two-month anniversary as a member of the Philadelphia Saddle Club and re-learning a lot about horses and the giving nature of horse people.

Which one of them would find me? I waited, self reflecting, with curiosity and doubt. I wondered if the numbness down the left side of my body is what stroke victims experienced. I did not want to find out. After the numbness subsided, I questioned if the wave of pain was what it felt like to be thrown off a horse. I didn't want to find that out either.

Another pained but somewhat peaceful minute passes before I look up to see Carmella rushing toward me. She is my angel. She stood across from me as I was unsaddling my mount, *Seamus,* a 17-year-old American Quarter Horse. As I was brushing *Seamus*, I secretly took a peek at Carmella and again admired her nearly flawless, deep, dark skin and fine features that mirrored those of her injured, yet spirited horse, *Tachyon. Tachyon* had been in his stall for more than a week, but Carmella came daily to groom him, nurture him and sometimes walk him around the stable. I remember wondering which creature was more beautiful: the horse or the longtime horsewoman from historic Germantown. I had been reading a lot about the area recently and wanted to know more about it and her. Maybe we would ride one day soon.

Only last Saturday, she and I had had a conversation in which she shared how her girlfriend and my father rode out of the same stable in South Jersey for many years. Apparently, he was somewhat of a legend as an early horse whisperer, and I thought perhaps my status rose in Carmella's eyes because of him. Yes, I had ridden as a child and into my early 20s, but then abruptly stopped. I'm not sure why: maybe marriage, career or partly fear of seriously injuring myself. After the fine bones in my hand crumbled in a car accident in my early 20s, I realized how fragile I, and life, could be.

Level-headed Carmella approached me with a mix of caution and compassion. I assured her that nothing was broken. I was sore and shaken and still needed a minute to catch my breath. She told me to take all of the time I needed, and we watched each other for 30 seconds or so in silence. When I was ready to get up, she told me to throw my arms around her neck and scolded me for trying to pick my bridle and crop up off the ground. She would take care of that and me. She is a relatively small woman, but oh-so-strong physically, and I sensed, spiritually as well.

As we made our way into the locker room, she gently lowered me onto the only cushioned chair, as my wide-eyed riding mates gathered round. They saw the ice and sawdust covering the left side of my body and realized the ride I took was not on a horse but on a patch of black ice. Diane, whom I give partial credit for getting me to join the club, offered Extra-Strength Excedrin. I immediately downed two. Marianna, who was to give

me a tour of the Weaver's Way Food Co-Op after our ride, pressed her Arnica homeopathic tablets into my hand. The label read: Good for trauma, bruises, and muscle soreness. I took to them like a kid to candy.

I put a note on the board cautioning others to be careful, but made a mental note to call our newest member who would be riding the next afternoon. I also vow to call my nearly 84-year-old neighbor and founding member of the club: Dr. Thomas Fitzpatrick, to urge him to stay home for a day or so, but I know that he won't. He's got the fever, too; horse fever. We all have it to varying degrees. It's contagious.

As I limp away from the stable, I feel my left side stiffening and know I must hustle home. On the way, nausea set in and then chills. Not good signs. I pass Chestnut Hill Hospital and almost turn in, but the thought of waiting in the ER makes me even more nauseous and what I really want is a warm bath and some steaming soup. Within ten minutes, I have both. Then my husband brings me a second helping of soup. He does not lecture. I am grateful. I am warmed.

Once under the covers, I start shaking – somewhat in shock and beginning to comprehend how very serious that fall could have been. My husband had taken a nasty fall on the ice in our driveway several years ago and had completely torn his quadriceps tendon away from the knee, resulting in emergency surgery and six months of intensive rehabilitation.

We went through the medicine cabinet and found some leftover prescription pain medication he had taken following a freak accident on the first hour of our much anticipated, but short-lived vacation, two months prior.

I dosed some and see the sun just coming up. Despite the drugs, I have slept all of three hours. While the Arnica and ice have helped ease the bruising, I still watch the myriad of colors rise on my thigh as the streaks of sun rise out of the morning sky. Mental note: cancel Wednesday's riding lesson. I am exhausted and shed a tear as I realize that I am calculating the length of time before I get back in the saddle again – a week would be pushing it, but maybe in ten days.

I make peace with the fact that it will take much more than this to go back to a life without horses – and horse people. Indeed, they are — we are — a special breed.

Thank you, my friends.

Chapter 8: *A Teenage Cowboy*
by Charles T. Sherf

Charlie Pfluger's father bought him his first horse. I remember it was black and we took turns riding him. We had very little experience and we each got bucked off immediately. We liked the horse and tried to keep quiet about the bucking experiences. One day Mr. Pfluger was watching and took the horse back immediately, in spite of our protests. In exchange he got *Star*, a nice horse almost 16 hands high. He was also a black horse but with a nice white star on his forehead; hence the name. He had a smooth canter, good speed, and didn't buck. We both practiced on *Star* until I got my first horse on April 16th, 1943. I still have the receipt. He was what is called a Paint horse and I named him *Paint.*

I didn't know much about buying horses, but I purchased him for $75 (they were asking $100) at Roy Hinkson's Dude Ranch. He only had one good eye. I did not have the extra $5 for the saddle so I rode home bareback from Moorestown to Maple Shade. I was overjoyed with that large animal: the first large purchase I had ever made. It was hard to save up that $75, but *Paint* was worth a million dollars to me.

Horse Dynamics

When I brought *Paint* home to the farm, Charlie and I did a dumb thing. Being young and best friends, we wanted our horses to get along. In the early fall, we

often left our horses out overnight. When we got home that day we put *Paint* and *Star* together. *Star* was a dominant horse and often fought with other workhorses on the farm. At first they seemed to be getting along, but some time during the night they must have started fighting. I guess *Paint* was getting the worst of it so he jumped the fence and was heading down Main Street in Maple Shade. Two police officers were hot on his trail when our buddy Tiddly came up and told them he thought *Paint* was the new horse on the farm. The police did not know what to do so Tiddly took old *Paint* back to the barn and put him inside the stall. My Dad gave him a $5 bill the next day. Once *Star* and *Paint* got over that initial fight, everything was fine.

Paint turned out to be a nice gentle horse, and I used him in rodeos closer to home, getting $5 bucks a ride, more if I stayed on for more than eight seconds. These were small-time rodeos, but "big time" to overworked farm boys. People came in droves from all over South Jersey to see cowboys make a successful eight-second ride on Roger's Pet. We got five dollars whether we made the eight seconds or not. However, there was an added incentive of $50 for the cowboy who lasted eight seconds. For two years, and at least 100 rides, nobody lasted the full eight seconds on Roger's Pet. The professional riders from Madison Square Garden came down a few times, but they did not get the job done either. In those post depression days, $50 was like a "King's Ransom."

We were happy teenagers. Imagine a poor kid like me working in the hot sun 60 hours a week for 50 cents an hour. My horse, *Paint*, and I were attempting to catch an oversized Brahma calf. It was late in the year, and those calves had become almost too large to rope. *Paint* was a young horse, but not overburdened with great speed. Those calves, as I remember, could run like deer and were very hard to throw to the ground if you could catch them. Roping was not my strong suit.

The following year, Bud Schuch, a local cowboy, found me a very fast buckskin horse. He was a half-Quarter horse and half-Thoroughbred. I used him for bull dogging, and he could probably catch a deer. I made some bucks with him!

When we were 17 years old, something happened that could have saved our lives. We never suffered serious injuries in the two years of rodeo riding, then late one day a 1,400-pound bucking horse reared up high in an attempt to unseat Charlie Pfluger. The horse came down hard on Charlie and broke his pelvis. "The cat was out of the bag," so to speak, and our rodeo romping days were over.

Charlie Pfluger eventually inherited some of the farm and was too busy working it to go back to the rodeo. I got a job as a printer for *The Philadelphia Bulletin* newspaper — a much safer and secure way to make a living.

Chapter 9: *The Advent of Indoor Plumbing – For Some*, Not for All by Charles T. Sherf

I had gone home about 9 o'clock one night and did not get to hear "The Big Fight" until Charlie Pfluger told me about it the next day. Mrs. Pfluger was usually gentle and refined, but not someone to be pushed around. Mrs. Pfluger did all of the buying for the week at Jobes store, a rather large store and butcher shop in Maple Shade, near Frank Beatty's house.

Mr. Jobes must have been quite a success financially, for there was eventually a town named Jobestown after him near Columbus, New Jersey. Despite being a bit of a show off and not the most skilled of riders, Mr. Jobes had a large horse named "*Big Boy*." *Big Boy* was taught to rear up on cue, which is a dangerous trick with a spirited horse like that who could easily lose balance and topple over. Every once in a while, when *Big Boy* was not getting enough exercise, Mr. Jobes would bring him over to the farm and Charlie and I would discipline *Big Boy* to break him of his rearing habit.

Frank Beatty, who was a trainer at Garden State Racetrack, told us how to break him. His theory was that we would take *Big Boy* to the farm where we could work him over. At the apex of his leap, we would hit him between the ears with a rubber hose. If that didn't work, then we would hit him between the ears with a bag of water. It did frighten the horse (and us), but broke him of that bad habit.

Anyway, I digress. Mrs. Pfluger would take us to Jobes' store and we would eat tasty pies and ice cream as our Saturday night binge. Since Mrs. Pfluger did all of the shopping, Uncle John would pay board to her. I noticed that Uncle John would never hand the money directly to Mrs. Pfluger, but would leave it on the kitchen window sill on Saturday night.

The crux of the big fight was that since Mr. and Mrs. Pfluger had two children, they wanted to fix up that old house. Electricity was only put in a few years before I came on the scene. Mrs. Pfluger wanted a new kitchen, a shower, tub and indoor toilet. Uncle John, it seems, did not think that was necessary. He had his out-house and, as far as I knew, he never showered. As I said, he was not a man to get close to. Uncle John would use that outhouse just about every night after supper and then went to bed. Since Uncle John did not pay the increased board, he never used the indoor bathroom, even during the cold winter. What a pity!

Chapter 10: *The "What If" Headlines Sink In*
by Barbara L. Sherf

"Flourtown Woman Killed in Equestrian Accident" or "Flourtown Woman Maimed in Horseback Riding Accident in the Wissahickon." Those are two of the headlines that form in my mind as I'm lying in the Emergency Room in Chestnut Hill Hospital. The "What If" scenarios play out in my mind.

Instead, the doctor comes in to report two broken ribs and a separated shoulder. "You can go home," he says, hovering over my bed as tears well in my eyes. "I am so lucky," I think, fingering the gold horse good luck charm my friend Krena recently sent me. It is July 2nd. As I wait in the lobby for my husband to pick me up, I replay the events of that day.

I am up before 7:00 a.m. I shower and "put on clean underwear" like mother always warned, under my riding pants. It is too hot to wear the back brace that I have been using since rehabbing a bulging spinal disk from the previous summer.

I put my new riding good luck charm on, pulling the black cord over my head, check my e-mail, and head out to Monastery Stables in West Mount Airy. My cooler is packed with two salads; one for me and one for my riding buddy, my soon to be 80-year-old father.

I have carrots and sliced apples for the horses. We are all a bit spoiled with this weekly routine.

I am running early, yet when I get to the stable, Dad is already there with *Wyatt*, a horse he rides once a week, thanks to a fellow who believes (as do we) that the horse is much better off getting out frequently.

Checking the Philadelphia Saddle Club Board to see if any horses are injured or reserved, I decide to play my latest "horse whisperer" game: whatever Saddle Club horse comes up to me in the upper turnout is the one I will take out. *Seamus* has his head in the hay bin. *Buddy* is taking in a long drink of water and looks tired. *Sunny* seeks me out and comes over to greet me.

"Okay, *Sunny* boy, it's you and me again," I say, attaching a lead rope to his halter and leading him to the cool, dark stable.

I say my hellos to Elliott, who is passing me with a wheelbarrow full of old straw and manure. I wonder where Emma is and eventually find she is not mucking stalls but just hanging out at the barn this morning. "Had a rough ride on *Dillon* last week. He did a rodeo act up by the Inn, and I was thrown off. I'm just taking the old man out today to get back in the saddle," she relays, referring to riding *Tommy,* a 23-year-old gentle soul who does no more than a medium trot these days.

"Were you seriously hurt?" I ask, as any rider would.

"I'm still hurting, but nothing is broken. He left me in the dirt and came back to the stables by himself."
"That's awful," I reply, shaking my head at the possibilities. She appears to be a bit shaken up talking about it and so I let it go.

Dad and I saddle up the horses and head out the back trail. We chit-chat about recent headlines in the news and his costly car repairs, as we head toward the Valley Green Inn. Along the way we see a group of teenage students. "Horses, horses," they cry out. I recall a fleeting thought about how wonderful it is that horses, bikers, joggers and nature's creatures can coexist on this trail.

I tell them that they can come up and pet *Sunny*, but they look at this 1400-pound beast and decline. "He's really sweet," I offer, but again they decline. We walk on. We pass a group of regular retirees who hang out on the benches in front of the Inn, and encounter a bicyclist or jogger here and there. The park is still pretty empty. It is summer. It is hot.

We make our way up a trail behind the Inn and go to the right. I tell Dad that I had been on the new demonstration trail the previous week with my friend Diane and a new gal from the barn, and urged him to explore this relatively rock-free trail with me. We go down the trail to scout it out, deciding that if it is clear, we will get a good trot in on the way back.
As we approach Wises Mill Road, I take the lead in

turning around and trotting *Sunny*. At first it is a slow trot, and then we pick up the speed. It is a beautiful trail, and I am astonished that we had not found it sooner. Dad and I have been riding every Wednesday morning for the past two years, and we figured we knew most of the trails, but not this beauty. Actually, there are signs on either end noting that it is a new trail restoration project, and I marvel that if all of the trails were like this, it would be a good thing for riders of both horse and mountain bike. Those were my last thoughts before it happens. The dreadful "it."

Sunny comes to a complete and abrupt stop, and I go flying over his head. The left side of my helmet hits the ground first, and instinctively I roll onto my shoulder and land on my back. There was no warning. I lie there catching my breath and realize a rib or two have been broken. Dad dismounts and gathers my horse's reins, fearing he will run or stomp on me. I look down and realize the force was so great that my clip-on sunglasses are under *Sunny*. I reach under *Sunny* for them and he does not move; he actually comes over to nuzzle me. Minutes pass as I try to compose myself and think of a plan of action. I now have *Sunny's* reins in my grasp. I make it onto two knees, and then grab the right stirrup to boost myself up.

"I'm okay, maybe a broken rib or two," I tell Dad. "I'm good enough to walk down to the Inn."

We walk about a quarter mile and miraculously I get a

cell signal, as we are still high on the ridge. I call the stable. Four rings, five rings. Another ring and I'll be going into voice mail. But on the sixth ring, Elliott answers. "Elliott, it's Barb. I've come off of *Sunny* and am making my way down to the Inn. Is Emma there?" I ask, knowing she is a rider and he is not.

"Hold on he says," putting the phone down and shouting, "Emma, Emma, where are you? Barb has been thrown…." Seconds tick by, and Emma coolly gets on the phone. She asks if I'm okay and for details.

"Emma, I'm heading down to the Inn. I've been thrown off of *Sunny*. I need to go to the hospital," I say without taking a breath. "Can you drive?" I ask, not knowing if she even has a license as she rides her bike to work from West Philadelphia.

"Is it an automatic?" she inquires, asking about my green Jeep.

"Yes, the keys are in my tack bag. Do you think you can drive up here and take *Sunny* back? I'll drive myself to the ER from the Inn." "Sure, if you think you can, I'm up for it. I'll be there as soon as I can," and she hangs up.

I sit on a bench and realize that I am now shaky, light-headed and nauseous. I also look down to see that *Sunny's* shoe has been completely torn off his foot, and his hoof is ripped up pretty good. I point it out to my

Dad. "That's what happened. He didn't just come to a complete stop for nothing. His shoe must have been ripped off by a rock or a tree root," I surmise, thrilled with the fact that there is a reason for his actions. *Sunny* comes over to nuzzle me again.

Jack Ott, the caretaker of the Inn, comes walking by. I know him and explain what happened. He sends out some water, and I sit on the bench as the retirees stare at my dusty riding clothes. I take off my helmet and see a nice gash in the once pristine black velvet. It's why I wear a helmet and insist that Dad wears one, too. How could Governor Rendell have repealed the mandatory helmet law for motorcyclists, I wonder.

It's time to call my husband, Brad. I'm hoping I don't get a cell signal, but it comes through loud and clear. He begins "the lecture" about how dangerous this is, asking if I would still want him riding a motorcycle?

I tell him I don't need the lecture and cut him off. "I'm okay to drive to Chestnut Hill. Why don't you meet me there?" I say, knowing Emma will be at the Inn with my Jeep and insurance information quicker than Brad.

Finally, I see my green Jeep. Emma actually parks legally and locks the vehicle. I laugh. It hurts to laugh. I am confirming my self-diagnosis of broken ribs.

I show her what happened to *Sunny's* hoof, and she says

she'll stay on the ground and walk him the two miles back to the stable. I am so grateful to her. I kiss Dad goodbye and tell him I'll call him. "Oh yeah, don't let those salads go to waste. Take them home with you," I urge him, never one to waste food.

Steering carefully with my left hand, I roll down the window as the nausea sets in again. Less than five minutes later, I pull into the hospital parking lot and into space reserved for ambulances. The security guard, seeing me limp and clutching my ribs, does not argue. He hands me a clipboard and asks me to give him my keys, and he takes the Jeep to valet parking. He comes back and hands me the ticket. "Free parking if you drive yourself to the Emergency Room," he says with a big grin.

"Well, isn't this my lucky day?" I respond, realizing again that indeed it is my lucky day, and things could have been a lot worse.

Thankfully, the ER is not full. The woman registering me is a former horse trainer, so she knows the lingo and listens to the story.

"You are really, really lucky," she says. I don't miss the second "really" she puts in for emphasis. I finger my good luck horse charm. I'm escorted to a room and realize, upon trying to get out of my collared shirt and into a hospital gown, that the shoulder is what really hurts. The nurses want to cut my sports bra off but I

protest, "it's been discontinued and one of only two I have left. You are not cutting it off!" They laugh.

The doctor comes in and he asks what happened. Tears well in my eyes, and I immediately defend *Sunny*. "It wasn't the horse's fault. His hoof got caught under a tree root, I suppose, and his shoe came right off. I hope he's okay," I say.

"No, what happened to you and where does it hurt?" he asks, smirking as he sizes me up for one of those "horse people." I relay my rib and shoulder issues. No, I did not black out. Yes, I walked about a quarter of a mile down to the Inn. Yes, I drove myself to the ER.

He orders x-rays and asks what my pain level is. Upon checking in, it was a 7, on a scale of 1 to 10. Now it is approaching a 9. He says they'll give me a shot of morphine. "It'll be quicker and since you are nauseous, we don't want pain meds coming back up," he says. I hate needles, but quickly agree to this plan of action.

I lay there. The TV is on and I watch *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, but even answers to the easy questions elude me. Twenty minutes pass. The meds are kicking in.

"How are you?" the doctor says after knocking on the door.

"I feel fine," I say with certain giddiness. "This guy's not doing so great," I say pointing to the contestant on

the tube.

He laughs and turns off the set. The x-rays are back confirming two broken ribs. He tells me what numbers, but I don't remember. I just feel them under my right breast. It hurts to breath. It hurts to laugh. I like to laugh.

He says that I should see an orthopedic specialist for the shoulder injury. Nothing is showing on the x-rays, but typically muscle issues don't. I can leave whenever I want. Part of me wants to ask him to turn the TV back on to see the outcome of *Millionaire*, but I don't. The nurses come in. It is clear that I will not get the bra or the shirt back on. I leave in a hospital gown, my riding pants and boots. What a sight that was!

In the lobby, I start making some calls. The security guard winces as he overhears my conversation. Brad shows up in his oversized pick-up truck. The guard wheels me over to it. I struggle to get in. Eventually I do, but it isn't pretty.

Each bump brings grunts and groans from me. He eases off the gas and we make our way home. He helps me off with my boots and pants, and despite smelling like a barn, I sink into the sofa in my hospital gown.

I am home. My dog *Simba* is here looking over at me, sensing something is wrong. He gets a good sniff of

my boots and riding pants. "It wasn't his fault," I tell him, as the tears finally flow. "It wasn't anybody's fault. These things just happen," I tell him. He looks at me through his big brown eyes and lies down next to me with a sigh. "I am home. I am hurt, but I am alive," I say out loud. "I am alive."

Chapter 11: *Cutting Back on Horsin' Around*
by Charles T. Sherf

We learned that year at Madison Square Garden, where the "Big League" riders competed, there was a large gray bucking horse who perhaps was smarter than the others. The saddle bronc had gained the reputation that if he could not throw the rider off, he would rear up straight on his back legs and flip over backwards. Can you image a 1400 pound horse rolling on top of you and the horn from the saddle stabbing you in the gut? The "Big Time" guys refused to ride that horse so he was sold cheaply to the Totem Ranch in Maple Shade as a saddle bronc; a horse that would put on a good show for the paying customers. To some spectators, that was all that counted.

When we first started to ride at "Totem Ranch," Frank Beatty, the professional rider, 5 years older than us and already married, convinced us that the saddle bronc was not that dangerous. Well, one Sunday afternoon, Charlie Pfluger rode the big gray saddle bronc and it reared up and over as usual. I almost had to pull Charlie out from under that horse. Frank Beatty and I advised Charlie not to ride him anymore, but Charlie's sense of bravado took hold and he attempted to ride that gray monster the next Sunday. Of course, the horse reared and rolled over on Charlie again. Fred Beatty and I dragged Charlie Pfluger from under the horse and somehow got him home. Everyone was in bed.

Charlie could hardly move his legs, but somehow I managed to get him up the steps and to his bedroom. He thought a good night's rest was all he needed.

That Monday morning I am running in the lane at 7 o'clock, and see his parents are sitting on the porch. I tried to act surprised when they told me he was in the hospital with a broken pelvis. It may have been the luckiest thing that ever happened. No one ever sued people in those days, but the Pflugers were thinking of it. Shortly after that the Totem Ranch went bankrupt. We were about 16 years old and our careers as saddle bronc riders were over. I grew up a lot that year. I stayed another year or so and decided I would like to become a printer. Hospitalization, good wages, etc. would beat the farm.

That summer, while Charlie Pfluger was recovering, his older sister, Marie, was studying to be an X-ray technician. Mrs. Pfluger had just bought a 1941 fluid-drive Dodge 4-door sedan. After driving mules, tractors and old trucks up until this time, that was a vehicle a 17-year-old would drool over. Marie fixed us up with dates with student nurses and I would usually be the chauffer on weekends. Charlie was on light duty and could not drive. Those nurses were about a year or two older than us and it was fun to try to catch up to their wiser ways. We were actually a little below our ages in the 'wicked ways of the world', but we were apt pupils. That's all that's fit to print here.

Note: Dad always had access to or shared a horse with many individuals throughout my childhood.

I remember riding *Wrangler* and then *Blue* in Pennypack Park in Philadelphia, a horse or two in Tyler State Park in lovely Bucks County, and dear *Molly* in South Jersey.

I clearly remember my sister, Patrice, getting thrown off a horse on the last day of school one year and having to endure wearing a full length plaster cast on her arm for he remainder of the summer. Those were the end of her riding days. Selfishly, I embraced the idea of having *Blue* to myself all summer.

The Final Chapter Remains to be Written
by Barbara L. Sherf

It is too early to write the final chapter of our horseback riding escapades. Dad and I went out in mid-October 2008 with Wyatt. I walked most of the way to the Valley Green Inn with Dad in the saddle. On the reverse trip, I did hop on *Wyatt* and trotted for a spell. It felt good to be back in the saddle, despite the sharp pains creeping into my right shoulder. I was not scared at all, because I knew that the accident I sustained earlier in the year was just a freak accident.

It felt good just to be around Dad and to hear more of his stories. For now, I am on medical leave from the Philadelphia Saddle Club, doing my physical therapy and taking a break for a spell.

I feel honored to have had nearly three years of weekly rides with Dad and even more fortunate to get to hear and document some of his stories. This book is being published as as Dad comes up on his 80th Birthday on November 27, 2008. Copies will be shared with family and friends and, perhaps, it will spark a whole new round of stories from him and the next generation.

Thanks Dad, for the great rides and the lessons you taught me about people and animals. As the Cowboy Mission states: The best sermons are lived, not preached. Thanks to you, I know that to be true.

With Love,
Barbie



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