

HORSE CRAZY GIRLS: ADVENTURES AND MATURING IN THE AMERICAN WEST:

AN ORIGINAL NONFICTION COLLECTION AND POETRY MANUSCRIPT

AND ANALYSIS OF ARISTOTELIAN TRAGIC FLAWS

IN SELECTED WORKS OF CREATIVE NONFICTION AND CONFESSIONAL POETRY

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Abstract approved:

This thesis presents a manuscript of poems and creative nonfiction essays, *Horse Crazy Girls: Adventures and Maturing in the American West*, which is contextualized in the discussion presented by a critical foreword. The foreword analyzes the narratology of two antithetical nonfiction books by Mary Karr and Roxane Gay written more than two decades apart as well as confessional works from Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds, and Kim Addonizio according to the ways these diverse works demonstrate characteristics of Aristotelian tragic structure. The Aristotelian traits of hamartia and catharsis exhibit themselves in modern day nondramatic works, which readers do not usually consider when discussing tragic structure or ideas. The foreword maintains that using both *hamartian narratology* and *homodiegetic narratology* offers the authors purgation and catharsis.

Works of creative nonfiction are appropriately analyzed in these terms because these works not only present the challenges and misfortunes the authors experience in their lifetimes but also seek to discover and expose character flaws in order to achieve some form of reflective insight or catharsis. In works such as Mary Karr's *Liars Club* and Roxane Gay's *Hunger*, the confessional tones help the reader recognize the flaw (hamartia) and a character or character's catharsis of emotions associated with realizing and expressing their own realization of that flaw either in themselves, a spouse, or a parental figure.

The foreword further maintains that poets also express themselves through hamartic and homodiegetic narratologies. Sylvia Plath's journals and poem "Daddy" exhibit these tendencies, as do Sharon Olds's "I Go Back to May 1937" and Kim Addonizio's "The First Line is the Deepest." In considering these works and the original creative manuscript, the foreword posits that writers who confess personal tragedy or communicate angst during their writings exhibit relief for unburdening themselves of secrets kept most of their lives.

Search terms: creative nonfiction, confessional poetry, hamartia, homodiegetic narratology, Aristotelian tragic flaws, anagnorisis, peripeteia, catharsis

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Introduction

Humans have been compelled to preserve their traditions and heritage through both verbal exchanges and the written word. As early as 44,000 years ago, etchings on the cave walls show that the inhabitants of Indonesia demonstrated the need to communicate or preserve their way of life (Devlin). For generations, man was content to simply write and enjoy the written word; however, as education and literature advanced, researchers felt motivated to not only write and read but also examine the motive authors have when producing their works. The use of various forms of narratology allow the author to tell his or her story in a way that not only informs but also entertains.

This thesis delves into the use of various forms of narratology and presents Aristotelian traits found in both the creative nonfiction and poetry genres. These traits are demonstrated in many modern pieces as well as earlier work. The presentation of a manuscript of poems and creative nonfiction essays, *Horse-Crazy Girls*, with a critical foreword aligning the narratology of two nonfiction books by Mary Karr and Roxane Gay written more than two decades apart as well as confessional works from Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds, and Kim Addonizio are also presented within this document. The Aristotelian traits of hamartia and catharsis will be defined and discussed. The foreword investigates the use of both *hamartia narratology* and *homodiegetic narratology* as a method of offering authors purgation. The original manuscript is contextualized within this discussion.

Works of creative nonfiction (CNF) present the challenges and misfortunes the authors experience in their lifetimes and their journey to discover and expose character flaws in order to achieve some form of reflective insight or catharsis. This work explores Mary Karr's *Liars Club*

and Roxane Gay's *Hunger*, noting that the confessional tones help the readers recognize the flaw (hamartia) and a character or character's catharsis of emotions of a spouse, parental figure, or even the authors themselves that are associated with the recognition and expression of discovering that flaw.

The foreword also explores confessional poetry, which displays hamartic and homodiegetic narratologies. Sylvia Plath's journals and poem "Daddy," exhibit these tendencies as do Sharon Olds's "I Go Back to May 1937" and Kim Addonizio's "The First Line is the Deepest." These works and the original creative manuscript propose that writers who confess personal tragedy or communicate anxiety during their writings exhibit relief for unburdening themselves of secrets kept most of their lives. My manuscript, *Horse-Crazy Girls: Adventures and Maturing in the American West*, unveils my escapades horseback with girls of my age. What my friends had that I did not was a normal life with two parents, and what they did not know was that my home life was a nightmare. I was living with sex abuse, an abusive alcoholic mother, and an absentee father. I envied their home lives but hid it very well. Little did they know that their fearless leader of mischief was really a very lonely, troubled child. My horse was actually my savior of sorts as I escaped into my own world every time I mounted up. Writing about our adventures initially was entertaining; however, after reading the works of Karr, Gay, Plath, Olds, and Addonizio my own creations became more thoughtful and reflective. In their creative nonfiction works, Karr and Gay expose their struggles while maturing and experience catharsis through their candidness. They also identify fatal flaws within their families and themselves without repudiating said flaws. In their poems, Plath, Olds, and Addonizio present unsavory topics without shame or embarrassment. The three poets also expose fatal flaws and experience catharsis with their writing. In my creative nonfiction, there are life lessons my friends and I

learned, which helped me recognize that the strife in my life was not going to last forever, much as the bonds we formed had no chance to last either. My stories and poetry, especially my later works, have exposed tragic heroes and catharsis for me.

Section one: Aristotelian Traits Found Within Creative Nonfiction and Confessional Poetry
Exploring Aristotelian traits of *hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, and *peripeteia* resulting in catharsis.

Hamartic narratology is the sin or fault of a character introduced by Aristotle in his work *Poetics*, written around 330 BCE. Aristotle's concept of tragedy stated that literature is about character, and character is about action, and he used the tragedies to develop his theory. When studying tragedies, he examined them searching for what traits they had in common. He came up with three traits: the *hamartia* (defined above), *anagnorisis*, and *peripeteia*. *Anagnorisis* is the moment when the protagonist recognizes the truth of the situation, and it is many times self-recognized. *Peripeteia* is a "turn around" or "reversal of fortune." Although this narratology is ancient, it can be recognized today in modern literature. *Hamartia* is a flaw, which leads to the downfall of a tragic hero. Aristotle's tragic fall represented famous or powerful characters; however, in the eighteenth century, the tragic protagonist became a middle-class character classified as *domestic tragedy*. In the twentieth century, the classification included anti-heroes and working-class protagonists. The tragic flaw represents itself as errors in judgement, crime, misunderstanding, or personality, not simply the time worn 'tragic flaw.' In their book *All the President's Men*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein show how former President Nixon "fell from grace" due to a sin or fault of his character. Modern day characters in CRN definitely show characteristics of *hamartia* narratology (Barry 224).

Aristotle was one of the first critics to develop a reader centered perspective to literature and drama. He explored how the audience was actually affected by the work they witnessed. Aristotle believed that tragedy should arouse feelings of fear and pity, basically sympathetic feelings and empathy, for the unfortunate circumstances the protagonist may experience. Aristotle called these circumstances *catharsis*, saying the emotions are exercised, not exorcised,

for the audience relates to the central character's plight. The definition of catharsis is *purgation*, or the relief of releasing strong or hidden emotions (Barry 21-22).

While researching the genre of confessional poetry and creative nonfiction, it became evident that hamartia and catharsis are present in nondramatic works along with examples of anagnorisis and peripeteia in some works.

Lee Gutkind discusses in depth the genre of creative nonfiction. Gutkind states that in the early 1960s, journalist, social commentator, and American novelist, Tom Wolfe, described CRN as new journalism. Eventually Wolfe's new journalism disappeared; although Lee Gutkind is the editor of the magazine *Creative Nonfiction*, he did not coin the term *creative nonfiction*. Author Dinty Moore researched the history of the term and discovered that in a review in the 1969 *Survey of Contemporary Literature*, David Madden first used the term interchangeably with the phrase imaginative non-fiction. The genre has become one of the fastest growing and popular genres in the last several years. Gutkind maintains that creative nonfiction can be prose or poetry, personal or non-personal. Most poetry is classified as fiction; however, works by Sylvia Plath and modern poets, Sharon Olds and Kim Addonizio are considered confessional works as all three of the authors divulge personal and private feelings and experiences. CNF is developing as readers enjoy viewing others lives through the homodiegetic and hamartic narratology, which creates a personal and many times investigative side to the work.

An important, vital component of successful CNF is *passion*. Gutkind asserts that writers must have a passion for the written word, for investigation, involvement, and even clandestine observation to seek and retrieve the truth. CNF produces narratives which are true and entertaining. Dry, accurate details put into a story may dissuade readers from completing a reading as they get bored quickly; moreover, CNF requires that all places, dates, names,

quotations, and descriptions may not be altered in any way whatsoever. These requirements actually present a more accurate account of happenings, for the authors research a subject on a more profound level and unearth or present a larger truth. *All the President's Men* is an example of creative nonfiction and had a devastating effect leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The reporters who investigated the Watergate affair, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, had the passion to find the truth for their book and were meticulous in their research and fact finding (Gutkind 7, 9, 11).

Dinty W. Moore offers his concept of CRN in an online video lesson, "What is Creative about Creative Nonfiction?" Nonfiction means telling the truth; creativity is in the arrangement of words, sentence structure, and paragraphs. The author does not fictionalize his or her story and alter it to make it as entertaining as possible; the creativity lies in the use of metaphors, descriptions, and details brought to the page. It is the truth, not an embellished memory, but the absolute truth as closely as can be reported.

Pam Houston emphasizes how dialogue affects a story. She states using narration puts strength into one's writing by creating tension and revealing character. However, in CNF, the author must use real dialogue, which may challenge a story's authenticity if it is a dialogue from many years in the writer's past. Lee Gutkind offers a solution to this conundrum by giving authors "permission to lie." While lecturing to a graduate class at the University of Pittsburgh, Gutkind was approached by Jane Bernstein, author of *Loving Rachel*, a book chronicling the life of her family raising a severely handicapped child. Bernstein stated that she was having difficulty traversing from fiction to nonfiction while writing her book. She gave herself permission to lie in the rough draft to help her move forward with her work and then in the final draft, she removed or repaired the lies. Gutkind maintains that by allowing herself to insert the lies into the original

manuscript, Bernstein was able to write a more factual account in the final piece as it aided in bringing back the true memories and assisted Bernstein in her quest to move from fiction to nonfiction (117-118).

In creative nonfiction the narrative of the work is evident and important as it adds depth, personality, and realism to a story. The criticism of narratology is derived from structuralism and semiotics. Narratology consists of the design of a common literary vernacular, or a code of textual patterns operating within a work. Theoretically, its beginnings lie in the fact that narratives are found in many mediums including oral and written gestures, languages, and music. The interesting fact is that many of the same narratives can be seen in multiple mediums. The foundations of narratology began and progressed in the mid-twentieth century. Vlasimir Propp's *Morfologiya skazki* (1928, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*) and Gerard Genette's "Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method" (1972) were two of the early works, which laid the basis for narratology (Augustyn).

In 1972, Gerard Genette introduced his work, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Although Genette discusses fiction, his work is important as he also goes into detail discussing narrative theory. Genette discusses point of view, focalization, the iterative, and norm and anomaly, which can all be applied to either fiction or nonfiction (10-11).

Peter Barry concludes that narratology can be more closely defined as "the study of how narratives make meaning, and what the basic mechanisms and procedures are, which are common to all acts of storytelling" (222-223). Barry argues that narratology is not the interpretation and reading of an individual story, but the endeavor to study the nature of work as a cultural process or concept (223).

Two popular movements appear in narratology, and the majority of narratologists tend to place themselves along the continuum somewhere between the two. The first movement involves the narrative's poetics: the definitions, identifications, presentation of the terms, relations, and structures, which are essential to describe all forms of narratives. The second movement is a completely rhetorical perspective describing how and why narratives are successful for and with readers. These two movements are homologous to each other; each can be examined on its own merits, but one cannot exist without the other. The readers examining the work need to be familiar with the rules of structure and a common classification held among narratologists. The terms and structure cannot come into being without consideration of how they function in and on the narrative and its readers (Fromm).

Another theorist who was influential in narratology is Roland Barthes. The importance of narratology in a work is the profound impact it has upon the message being delivered in the piece. Narratologists examine the language of a writing for its true or neutral historical telling; is the story truthful and accurate? The persona, style, voice, and function of the narrator is examined along with the use of verb tense and the establishment of connections among the story, writer, and audience through the use of pronouns. The outward and inward knowledge variations in the narration, the relationship between the implied author, the real author, and the voice or voices being narrated are examined in this criticism (Harmon 361). Roland Barthes developed a code for examining a text that uses five organizational structures. By examining a story line by line using Barthes's code, readers discover the multiple meanings and connotations of a work. When comparing two works of the same genre, such as Mary Karr's *Liar's Club* and Roxane Gay's *Hunger* even though the works are not related plot or character wise, they both belong to the CNF genre, and using Barthes's code, readers recognize the methods used by two completely

different authors twenty years apart, yet accomplishing the same goals of telling a truthful account of happenings in an artful, entertaining way (Felluga). Creative nonfiction is not the only genre exhibiting both hermaria and Aristotelian traits. Confessional poetry exhibits both traits and has become well received since its appearance.

Confessional poetry is defined as “the use of private-even shocking-autobiographical material” (qtd.in Gwynn and Linder 490). Many confessional poets introduce historically unspeakable topics such as infidelity, mental illness, alcoholism, and dysfunctional families, thus creating an age of personal revelation. Some critics do not take confessional poetry seriously, calling it “gut spilling,” while one proponent who writes confessional poetry, Sharon Olds, prefers to call it “apparently personal” as she is opposed to calling it a biography (Gwynn and Linder).

Robert Lowell is credited for being one of the pioneers in confessional poetry with his work *Life Studies* written in 1959. Lowell’s poetry, up to this point in his life, was what he considered mundane and flat. During the writing of *Life Studies*, his home life was deteriorating and exceedingly difficult; therefore, his work developed a confessional tone (Rollins 71).

Confessional poetry does not simply reveal private feelings and occurrences; the poets perpetuate elevated craftsmanship within their writing, paying attention to prosody. The genre became quite popular in the 1950s and 1960s and changed the way poetry is written today.

Edward Byrne discusses confessional poetry in his essay, “Examining the Poetry of Confession and Autobiography: *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*,” which begins by claiming Walt Whitman was responsible for drawing attention to self in poetry in the opening line of “Song of Myself.” In his essay, Byrne discusses poetry critic M.L. Rosenthal's disdainful referral to poets chronicling personal autobiographical matters as “personal confidences, rather

shameful,” for which he established the term “confessional,” thus labeling the movement of mid-twentieth century poets. Rosenthal recognized the discussion of many subjects previously taboo in print: infidelity in marriages, mental breakdowns, and personal failures. These topics became public, allowing anyone to read and discuss freely; therefore, confessional poetry became identified by its content (Byrne).

Deborah Nelson states in her essay, “Confessional Poetry,” a confessional movement never existed as an organized school of poetry. Nelson notes: “no confessional poet imagined himself or herself to be part of a movement. The poets never congregated as the confessional poets; they almost universally disliked the term as it applied to their work” (Di Stefano). However, due to the subject matter of her works, Nelson has been labeled a confessional poet. In her article “Beyond Privacy: Confessions Between a Woman and Her Doctor,” she exhibits parallelism between the conversations a woman has with her doctor and confessional poetry. Sylvia Plath was quite candid concerning her experiences with doctors and psychiatrists in her works. Nelson points out that “Plath made use of a medical context to reveal the deep and pervasive intrusion of medical science into the ‘private’ space of the body” (Nelson 263).

Dante Di Stefano contends that confessional poetry since its inception in the early 1960s has contributed immensely to the development of American lyric narrative poetry from then until the second decade of this century. Di Stefano asserts from the time of its coinage, the term “confessional” dealing with poetry has been difficult. Rosenthal’s articulation of confessional writing posits confessional poetry as a type of therapy for the soul. *Life Studies* was the initial book of confessionalism providing stark visions into the poet’s private life and struggles. It covers family history, contemptuous feelings toward his father, his psychological issues as an adult, and his feelings concerning the dissolution of his first marriage. Lowell chose to make his

private, public. The collapse of privacy leads poems to shameful and embarrassing admissions. The confessions in some poems invite readers to repeat what the poet confessed; confession elicits complicity that may cause readers to doubt the truth of the story. Even if Lowell is not the speaker of the poem, the inspiration distinctly transpires from shame and guilt.

In most romantic poetry as well as high Modernism, the sources of inspiration are not revealed. However, in *Life Studies*, nothing remains hermetic or impersonal. Rosenthal states: “Lowell removes the mask. His speaker is unequivocally himself, and it is hard not to think of *Life Studies* as a series of personal confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor bound not to reveal” (Di Stefano). This style makes Lowell’s work seem less sophisticated and unifies the multiple narrative voices in *Life Studies*, which offer too much of a credulous evaluation of the poems. Critics identify the confessions of personal unsavory details with truth. Therefore, the mastery of the speaker remains unquestioned. Rosenthal’s description of confessional poetry encumbers the meaning of Lowell’s poems with hazy conceptions of shame and authenticity. Rosenthal’s assessment of *Life Studies* depends upon the connection between personal admission, secret guilt, and public veracity. Adam Kirsch contends that before *Life Studies*, Lowell’s generation of poets were restricted by hypocritical doctrine; however, after revealing dysfunctional family issues and mental illnesses, there was a general catharsis, and poets were unafraid to expose their most private issues and experiences. Lowell taught that Modernist allusions and ambiguities are not nearly as important as straightforward, agonizing honesty (Di Stefano).

The Aristotelian traits of tragic flaws and catharsis are present in many creative nonfiction works and confessional poetry. The difference between a biography and these two genres is that most biographies do not go into the sordid details of the subject's life. The

biographer and his or her subject want to present the most appealing characteristics of the person being biographed. Humans are basically flawed, and the concealment of indiscretions or private medical issues take a toll on the human psyche. The majority of the public deal with their issues in a variety of ways: drinking, drug usage, counseling, or in extreme cases suicide or violence toward innocent people.

A number of indomitable authors and poets have dealt with these issues by discussing them in their works. Since its inception and popularity, creative nonfiction and confessional poetry has offered insight and relief for not only the writers but also their families and readers. To know that someone else has experienced the hardships one is reading about is encouraging. The authors or poets conquered their problems; therefore, there is hope that the readers can also find relief from their difficult situations. Recognizing the tragic flaw in oneself or a loved one helps to understand and cope with said issue. The act of discussing or writing about one's flaws offers the writer a catharsis or release. The reading of one of these works offers hope and puts the reader in the position to understand and perhaps gather the courage to discuss the hidden issues he or she is facing. I had no idea that many women my age had experienced much of what I did as a child. Alcoholic or abusive parents or siblings were not topics one discussed openly with anyone, even a close friend. However, once the victim voices his or her secret or secrets, there is a feeling of relief and catharsis. I find myself writing about situations I would never have mentioned before and with an intensity I never realized existed. I feel that I have not even scratched the surface of my imagination and memory.

“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.” — Aristotle

Section two: Exploring Aristotelian Traits and Catharsis in Selected Creative Nonfiction and
Confessional Poetry

Aristotelian traits and catharsis are quite evident in creative nonfiction works and confessional poetry. Through the use of hamartia and catharsis, authors enhance their works and their audience's responses to their art. One such author who has accomplished this feat is Mary Karr. Her memoir *Liar's Club* demonstrates characteristics mentioned by Gutkind, Moore, and Houston, making it a riveting account of her life and an excellent example of creative nonfiction. Karr's work contains both hamartia and homodiegetic narratologies, allowing Karr to tell her story in a way that not only informs but also entertains.

Karr's story divulges her turbulent childhood under the tutelage of divorced parents. She and her sister are at their alcoholic mother's mercy as she travels from town to town and man to man following the divorce. Karr's mother, Charlie, is unstable and borderline schizophrenic. The memoir revisits Karr's mother's love/hate relationship with her own mother and its effect on Charlie Karr. Karr also demonstrates the deep love she has for her father even after the divorce. The real heroine of this story is Karr's sister, Lecia, who only two years older, kept her little sister as grounded as she could under the difficult circumstances. Karr tells stories about her many stepfathers, her mother's drunken rages, hospitalization in a psych ward, and physical attacks on both girls.

Liar's Club, was a *New York Times* best seller, won PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the best first nonfiction, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and was given the Texas Institute of Letters Prize for best nonfiction. Lending to the book's critical and popular success is its narratology. Karr's candor and frankness appeal to her readers. Karr makes no apologies for her language, graphic details, and shocking descriptions, nor does she soften her

memoir. The young Karr was raped and does not assuage the event. “I was seven [...] My school record says I weighed about fifty pounds [...] Then think about a newly erect teenaged boy on top of that and pumping between my legs” (66). Karr’s own mother told her to “tell it as it was” despite the fact that to do so would expose her to the criticism that would follow on the heels of the book. This was Charlie Karr’s anagnorisis; she realized the truth of her and her daughters’ past. In the memoir she is quoted as saying, “Hell, get it off your chest...If I gave a damn what anybody thought, I’d have been baking cookies and going to PTA” (Karr XI). How many readers were disgusted with the way Karr and her sister were treated by the very people who were supposed to guide them and keep them safe? The use of homodiegetic narratology within Karr’s work shapes and manufactures the spirit of the work; readers know she is the protagonist as well as the narrator of the story, so she should know what actually happened. Her frankness is refreshing to some and disquieting to others. This book is not a “get even” work for Karr’s upbringing; instead the memoir actually had a cleansing effect on her and her family (Smith 52). Karr states that the public can see if a work is written for revenge and will not accept or enjoy it. In Karr’s words, “The reader is going to know you’re full of shit” (qtd. in Smith). “Call it aversion therapy, but the events seeped in a little more,” states Karr (XII). Through homodiegetic dialogue, Karr delivers a strong message to her readers; the way she speaks allows her readers to visualize what is occurring and to feel what she is feeling at the time. “The fact that my house was Not Right metastasized into the notion that I, myself, was somehow Not Right, or that my survival in the world depended on my constant vigilance against various forms of Not-Rightedness”(10). Karr’s grandmother came to live with them and brought many changes to the household. Karr observes, “Clearly, we had, all this time, been doing everything all wrong” (46). The use of hermeticism within this work defines Charlie Karr’s flaws, which nearly destroy

Mary and her sister, Lecia. Karr reveals that her mother had been married seven times, twice to her own father. Charlie Karr told her daughters that she married often because of her strict Methodist upbringing. There was to be no “fooling around” until a couple was married, and Charlie Karr admitted that she was fond of fooling around. “My mother didn’t date, she married” (10). On a rare family trip before the divorce, Karr and her parents and sister went to a lake for fun. Her mother did not join the girls and their father on the beach, but headed into the fishing shack to sketch a fisherman, “...but I knew with a cold certainty while I stood ankle-deep in that lukewarm water that she was climbing up there to get drunk” (109). At seven years old, Karr already knew the dangers of drinking and driving and the embarrassment if her mother phoned teachers or neighbors to give them a piece of her mind while drunk. “The big game for me once she’d started drinking was to gauge which way her mood was running that I might steer her away from the related type of trouble” (127).

Mary Karr chose to publish her memoir and, in the process, brought familial abuse into the public eye and gave others the courage to talk about and even write about their own terrible experiences. The creative non-fiction genre gives authors an opportunity to not only expose their deepest secrets but also heal in the process. Karr stated in an interview that following the publication of *Liar’s Club*, she was inundated with letters from readers thanking her for her honesty. She also states that complete strangers would approach her and “confess” that they also had suffered many of the atrocities she wrote about in her book (Smith 53).

In creative non-fiction or memoirs, the hamartia displayed by the author or his/her family exposes the sometimes unexplainable and perhaps unforgivable lives of the protagonists for readers to see; nothing is hidden. Karr’s mother’s tragic flaws are her alcoholism and her need to have a man in her life. While our contemporary American culture suggests to us that

every mother should be the hero in her children's lives, Karr's mother is a tragic hero who loses sight of that responsibility due to her personal demons. "Sometimes, instead of spanking us she [...] and scream up at the light fixture that [...] she knew if she got started she'd kill us" (Karr 71). An anagnorisis is a change where the action veers around to its opposite, a moment of recognition; Mary Karr depicts her anagnorisis concerning her mother at a point in the memoir when she and her sister call their father and suggest he talk to their mother himself concerning her actions while he's out of town working... "maybe hoping he'd get the idea that she didn't quite have both oars in the water"(Karr 84). The call to their father was in response to their mother's refusal to evacuate when it was inevitable that a hurricane would destroy their town.

Karr states in the introduction of her book that by the time *The Liar's Club* was in full circulation and her second book, *Cherry*, came out, her family had opened up, argued, discussed, and accepted their past. Speaking of events that had been avoided all of their lives, Karr states that as a family we "healed more--though that had never been the point--through exposure. Our distant catastrophes became somehow manageable" (XII). Creative non-fiction such as Karr's aids readers to look at their own private suffering. As a result, they may realize that they are not nearly as unfortunate as others. Readers may also see in a memoir like Karr's a model of how to speak candidly about their situation, a process by which they can put their lives into perspective and heal. A Broadway actress approached Karr after a yoga class and upon realizing who Mary Karr actually was burst into tears and announced, "Your book changed my life" (Karr XVI).

Karr is only one of many creative nonfiction authors today; Roxane Gay writes about her experiences very candidly also. Gay's book, *Hunger*, introduces her own demons, which culminate from her childhood as do Karr's. The book explores ways Gay reacts to her misuse and the effects of emotional trauma on her physical health. Gay's work discusses her struggle

with her weight. "Writing this book is a confession" (5). She is extremely candid concerning her "fatal flaw": purposeful gain of weight. Gay was gang raped at the age of twelve. Her reaction to the shame and degradation was to gain weight so that she would not be desirable to males. However, in the book that describes her horrifying experience, Gay does not ask for understanding or sympathy. Repeatedly her book communicates that she wishes to be treated as a human being, not as a disgusting thing to be heckled, stared at, and embarrassed by her largeness. At over 500 pounds, she experiences many struggles coping in society. "I am terrified of children, [...] to ask their parents or, sometimes, even me, 'Why are you so big?' I am terrified of the awkward pause of those children's parents as they try to respond appropriately" (172). Gay's story as it emerges in her work also demonstrates that the process of writing and speaking about her issues aids in the healing process. "Writing this book is the most difficult thing I've ever done [...] but I wrote this book because it felt necessary" (303). Gay's anagnorisis comes in the beginning of her book, which she writes thirty-eight plus years after her experience of being raped. "This is my refrain. Losing control of my body was a matter of accretion. I began eating to change my body. I was willful in this" (13). Unlike Karr, Gay's parents were concerned and did not cause the issue; instead they try desperately to help her control her eating habits. Gay never confesses what happened to her with the rape; therefore, her parents were ignorant of the cause of her weight gain. Karr's and Gay's confessions display fatal flaws completely dissimilar, but both unquestionably belong to the CNF genre containing representations of Aristotle's harmartic theory and catharsis. Both of these women write about personal tragic events in their lives with total honesty and candor and do not flinch at the flaws described within their works. They also relate their catharsis and purgation due to the writings. Another excellent avenue of catharsis and Aristotelian trait writing is confessional poetry.

One of the first confessional poets, Sylvia Plath, a student of Robert Lowell, claimed that Lowell's work influenced her own. One of Plath's most famous poems is "Daddy," written in October of 1962, the same month that she and her husband, Ted Hughes, separated. Plath was an unstable, neurotic, near schizophrenic person, yet an amazing poet. While researching Plath and reading her journals found in *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1952-1962*, it is quite evident that Plath had not only severe depression issues but also manic episodes; a few months before her suicide, she wrote twenty-six poems in thirty days. In her journal, in July of 1950, she wrote "Nothing is real except the present [...]. Some girl a hundred years ago once lived as I do. And she is dead. I am the present [...]. And I don't want to die" (10). This journal entry was one of her first; however, several entries later, Plath proclaims, "I want to kill myself, to escape from responsibility, to crawl back objectively into the womb" (149).

Her work is considered confessional and, moreover, definitely demonstrates hamartia and catharsis. Plath had a short, tumultuous life, and unfortunately, she never reaped the benefits of her fame while alive. In Plath's work "Daddy," both hamartia and catharsis are evident. In *The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath*, author Ronald Hayman describes Sylvia Plath's near "god complex" concerning her father who died when she was eight years old. She could not force herself to visit his grave for twenty-six years. Plath's fatal flaw was her inability to forgive her father for leaving her (albeit through no fault of his own), which led to her subconscious desire to join him. Critic A. Alvarez concedes, "She seemed convinced, in these last poems, that the root of her suffering was the death of her father, whom she loved, and who dragged her after him into her death" (Hayman 20). Early in her journaling, Plath makes the following admission: "I do not love. I do not love anybody except myself. [...]. I am afraid to face myself" (98). This statement could be construed as Plath's anagnorisis; Plath has no qualms about admitting her own flaw. In

her poem “Daddy,” Hayman maintains that Plath’s estranged husband, Ted Hughes, was a replacement for Plath’s dead father.

If I’ve killed one man, I’ve killed two----

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know.

Daddy, you can lie back now. (lines 70-75)

In *The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath*, Hayman reports that following her father’s death, Plath believed “It was her love, she says, that did both of them to death. He died after she brought her love for him to bear” (Hayman 28). Hughes and Plath were married for seven years before he was unfaithful to her, resulting in divorce proceedings. Plath was said to have an Electra complex as she simply could not get over her father’s death (Hayman 181). Her catharsis of these feelings occurs in the last line of “Daddy.”

“Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.”

This line could be construed two ways: that Plath is finished with Hughes or that she has finally accepted her father’s mortality and is able to accept his death. Either way, she has a catharsis and exorcises her demons concerning her father and the resentment she feels toward her estranged husband, Hughes. “Daddy” displays more Aristotelian traits than just hamartia. Line 70 demonstrates Plath’s anagnorisis when she rationalizes that she not only killed one man (her father) but two; the second would be the death of her relationship with Hughes. Lines 71-73 exhibit the Aristotelian trait of peripeteia when Plath reverses roles and blames her misfortune on Hughes, accusing him of being a vampire. Plath was not the only poet to use this structure. Sharon Olds, while psychologically more stable and self-sufficient, does as well. Olds’s poetry

exhibits the Aristotelian traits of hamartia and catharsis. In an interview Olds states, "Poems like mine--I don't call them confessional, with that tone of admitting wrongdoing--doing. My poems have done more accusing than admitting. I call work like mine 'apparently personal'. Or in my case apparently very personal" (Macdonald).

Olds was raised in an extremely strict, religious atmosphere being abused by both her mother and her father. In her poem "The Day They Tied Me Up," Olds describes the reaction her parents had to her dumping India ink on their bedspread. She was to sit in the chair without food until she apologized. After hours, her mother came to her and hand fed her some soup while leaving her tied to the chair. Later poems of Olds's, "Beyond Harm" and "I Go Back to May 1937," show the scars she carries from an abusive father and submissive mother. Upon examination of "I Go Back to May 1937," Olds's readers understand the fear and trepidation she experienced as a child under her abusive father. Olds wishes to warn her parents that their relationship is all wrong; describing the tile glinting behind her father's head as "bent plates of blood" forewarns the readers that violence is in the future. Describing the gate behind her mother as having "sword tips" sets the stage for her father's complete dominion over her mother. The following lines show just how much Olds wants to change the couple's course:

I want to go up to them and say Stop,
 don't do it--she's the wrong woman,
 he's the wrong man, you are going to do things
 you cannot imagine you would ever do,
 you are going to do bad things to your children, (lines 13-17)

Both of Olds's parents display hamartia in this work and are the tragic heroes in her life. Lines 14-17 display Olds's anagnorisis. She knows her parents are not good for each other but cannot

do anything to help them. Her mother is submissive and frightened, and her father displays alcoholism, abusiveness, and arrogance. Olds's poetry does not seek pity or hate; she--like others in this genre--simply produces what comes out of herself at the moment, openly and candidly.

As far as a catharsis concerning her father, her poem "Beyond Harm" presents an impression of relief in the last stanza. Even though she had suffered at his hands, she still longed to know that he loved her.

A week after my father died,
suddenly I understood
his fondness for me was safe--nothing
Could touch it. In that last year (lines 1-4)

Lines 2-4 and 17-19 exhibit a peripeteia experienced by the narrator. She realizes that her father really does love her.

[...] The last
Week he even said it, once,
by mistake. I walked into his room and said
"How are you," and he said, "I love you
too." From then on, I had
that word to lose. [...] (lines 14-19)

But then, a while after he died,
I suddenly thought, with amazement, he will always
Love me now, and I laughed--he was dead, dead! (lines 25-27)

Her laughter comes from the realization that she faced her father's past abuses, but on his deathbed, she has an anagnorisis and realizes that he did love her, and since she did not anger

him, he never took back that he loved her. The final two lines of “Beyond Harm” demonstrate her catharsis, relief, and satisfaction concerning her father’s feelings for her. She *laughed*; he was dead and could not take away her joy.

“Sharon Olds is enormously self-aware,” wrote David Leavitt in the *Voice Literary Supplement*. “Her poetry is remarkable for its candor, its eroticism, and its power to move” (Sharon).

Sylvia Plath demonstrated Aristotelian traits in her confessional poetry laced with suicidal references. Sharon Olds introduced readers to parental abuse, and Kim Addonizio is an accomplished poet and author of several books who is known for her outspoken, sexual laced confessional poetry; however, in an interview Addonizio states, “It’s a curse to say that somebody is confessional” (Dean). Addonizio also states in the same interview that while writing her latest book, *Bukowski in a Sundress: Confessions from a Writing Life*, “that she was ending a relationship badly, and she needed to write about it--exhibiting that writing is a catharsis for this successful author (Dean).

Addonizio’s poem “The First Line is the Deepest,” presents many Aristotelian traits and some catharsis. The following lines offer a form of catharsis: “and the dildo that goes by Tex,/ and I have gone out, a drunken bitch,/in order to ruin/what love I was given” (lines 6-8) announcing unapologetically sexual preferences. Some readers may consider this hamartia and a flaw. She finds solace in drugs: “and also I have measured out/ my life in little pills—Zoloft, / Restoril, Celexa, / Xanax.” (lines 9-12) These lines present her anagnorisis as she sees how she copes with life and its frustrations while using the antidepressants. She continues, “I have. For I am a poet. / And it is my job, my duty/ to know wherein lies the beauty” (lines 13-14) These lines appear to offer a catharsis and a peripeteia as the poem resumes,

“of this degraded body,
 or maybe
 it’s the degradation in the beautiful body,
 the ugly me (lines 15-18)

Groping back to my desk to piss
 on perfection, to lay my kiss
 of mortal confusion
 Upon the mouth of infinite wisdom. (lines 16-19)

Lines 16-19 display hamartia once again; she seems to poison everything she touches.

“the sewage-filled streets. Whose world this is I think I know.” (lines 34-35)

The last line of this poem “Whose” hints at an anagnorisis for the author.

Daniela Gioseffi, writing in the *American Book Review*, affirmed that Addonizio
 “is wise and crafty in her observations and her portrayal of sensual love, filial feeling,
 death or loss” (Addonizio).

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Section III: Aristotelian Techniques and Purgative Effects for the Writer of Creative Nonfiction
and Confessional Poetry Contained Within *Horse-Crazy Girls*...

In my classroom teaching, I often hear my students question the validity and importance of ancient authors and their works. They ask, “Why do we have to read dead people’s stuff?” Researching creative nonfiction and confessional poetry answers that question; one only has to know about Aristotle's concepts to understand that generation after generation use his concepts in their works. The use of hamartia and homodiegetic narratologies within works bring the works alive and enhance their readability. Authors and experts alike agree that writing honestly and candidly about our experiences, particularly painful ones, brings about a purgation, releasing us from burdens a majority of us have carried since as far back as childhood.

James W. Pennebaker states, “Similar to religious confession, expressive writing encourages individuals to explore their deepest thoughts and feelings about upsetting experiences. [...] people must be completely honest with themselves” (2). The purgation exhibited by CNF authors and confessional poets affects not only the authors but also their loved ones; defining the personalities’ tragic flaws within a work also contributes to the healing process of all involved.

According to Cristina Pupos by exposing their most intimate details in their poetry, poets succeed in the creation of strong empathetic bonds with the readers. She also states that to Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath’s estranged husband, confessing in poetry is something that has become extremely valuable as it articulates from the heart. Not only does confession cause the reader to empathize with the poet but also actually makes the reader become the victim, as the poet himself or herself (Pupos 15-17). By the confessor becoming the victim, confessing the secrets purges not only the readers but also poets.

Gillie Bolton reports, "...the value of the kind of writing this project encourages is that *expression is catharsis*. It can be safer to do this in writing than in speech" (120). Bolton goes on to say that the writing and rewriting of poetry is more than a catharsis, it brings about insight and consolidation resulting in therapeutic practice. Bolton believes that poetry is a more valuable therapeutic tool than prose as it can relate back to the author more intensely than prose because "One reacts, not just to what is written but to what seems to have around it unwritten" (120). Poetry is spontaneous and more emotional at the moment than prose.

A majority of poets and prose writers are most creative during times of high emotional stress or joy. Many times, emotions erupt within an author's work and underlying truths surface. The CNF essays and the poems interspersed throughout the following manuscript, "Horse Crazy Girls..." tend to focus on communicating life lessons and the maturation of my friends and me during a very formative time in our lives. The initial creation of these works was intended to produce reading for entertainment; however, through the process of exploring CNF, these works began to display hamartia and resulted in my own personal catharsis. Intentional or not, many authors discover tragic flaws within their characters. Once authors allow themselves to reveal hidden secrets buried for many years, often they discover writing about uncomfortable experiences offers them peace and relief. Both Mary Karr and Roxane Gay had the courage to speak about very personal atrocities they experienced as children, which ultimately brought about an awareness of familial and sexual abuse. Poets Olds, Plath, and Addonizio also aided in the process of bringing taboo subjects to the surface to be discussed and dealt with.

The essays in the manuscript offer a look at the American West through the eyes of preteens. The manuscript offers a glimpse of life with horses with the use of characterization, sensory details, unusual settings, and childish dialogue drawing the readers into a different time

and what, as reported by the young point of view, appears to be a simpler world. However, as the works grew and matured, Aristotelian elements began to surface. The story “Betty Big Boobs,” recounting the experience of the girls spying on a pair of lovers, awakened dark secrets hidden for many years in my subconscious. Therefore, the story took on a different meaning and brought forth a desire to write about the buried secret, which was my anagnorisis. I realized with this work that the sexual abuse I endured as a youngster made me more worldly than my friends because I recognized what was happening between the couple, and the others did not. Instinctively, I knew we should not be spying on them. Therefore, I experienced a peripeteia and actually related to Betty and her situation.

The poetry within this work represents Aristotelian characteristics also. The poem “Hate to Pity” began as an exercise in poetic writing and blossomed into a strong, cathartic experience. The act of writing that poem and actually admitting the strong negative feelings within it brought me much surprise and then purgation. I say surprise because I was not aware of the strong emotions I felt expressed within the poem. “I hated you,” was the refrain for the majority of the poem. “Morning Ritual” starts out as a lighthearted poem depicting the daily routine on a farm, but by examining it closely, one finds an underlying truth in the life and death struggle on a farm.

Researching Sharon Olds and Mary Karr opened wounds of my own; my mother was an abusive alcoholic who decided her fifth and youngest child was not going to disappoint her as her others had. It is amazing how cruel parents can be when in actuality, they should be protecting their children, not abusing them. My mother was convinced that she had not disciplined her other four children properly, so she exaggerated her punishments toward me. Olds’s poem “The Day They Tied Me Up” made me flash back to the punishments I received at the end of my mother’s belt for not doing the supper dishes within a thirty-minute time frame.

Karr's mother's drunken rages mirrored my mother's. However, she was not nearly as violent as Charlie Karr. I also learned how to read my mother's drinking stages; the difference was I was a teenager and could escape the house while Mary was just seven years old. My mother's dating in the early years after the divorce did not escalate into marriages as several of her suitors were still married; she eventually learned not to believe the interested men when they claimed that they were in the throes of divorce.

This manuscript began as an entertaining, storytelling adventure of horseback fun. However, the further I delved into my work, the more I found I could write about, and then I discovered that portions of my subconscious surfaced allowing me to explore my past more thoroughly. Different aspects of the time period emerged, which I had not even thought about such as gender, class inequalities, and race. The issue that was the strongest was class inequality. Although Debbie's father was a colonel, we did not treat her with any more respect than we did each other; however, our fathers were incredibly careful to respect his rank and position. Before my mother married her military men, my family was almost shunned. Divorcees with children were considered second class, which came as an anagnorisis to me as I matured. I had a difficult time for many years as I developed an inferiority complex over my family situation. Race was never an issue at the fort as the soldiers were all considered equal in our young eyes; we never gave any thought as to the men's color. Gender, on the other hand, lay somewhere in between race and class. Girls were expected to be feminine, weaker, and noncombative. My friends and I were in a different situation as cowgirls were allowed to be more aggressive and tomboyish. We were expected to take care of our horses and saddles, plus groom and stall our horses without having to ask anyone to help us.

The poetry within this manuscript, especially “Hate to Pity,” released me from the pent-up frustrations and anger toward my brother. Obviously, my brother is the person with the hamartia, but it took writing this poem to bring me to a state of peripeteia. I discovered that I should not feel inferior or immoral because of my feelings toward my own brother. My anagnorisis was the realization that he had been egocentric and insensible his entire life while I had been submissive and acquiescent. The composition of this poem was a definite catharsis for me. Releasing all of the emotions I felt during its origin produced an amazing purgation. I realized that by opening up and actually putting my feelings on paper was more healing than anything I had experienced before. The process of writing confessional poems and CNF stories introduces and brings forth hidden traumas and intricacies on the individual experience. The investigation allows the author to acknowledge and identify the truths of experience, and thereby to release the pain of them.

Horse Crazy Girls: Adventures and Maturing in the American West:
An original Creative Nonfiction Collection and Poetry Manuscript

The Joyride

I “borrowed” a horse,
who was just a colt
Without permission, of course.

Once upon him, he shot off with force.
I hung on tight after the bolt;
Against my legs, his coat was coarse.

It was wonderful to be ahorse,
Even though he was just a colt,
But I was about to be unhorsed.

As gravity had to be enforced,
For as hard as I tried, I couldn’t get a holt,
My tenuous grip I failed to enforce.

He was just a colt, but felt like a racehorse
Breaking from the start with a bolt,
And I landed on the ground with much force.

My life after this changed course,
For my arm did break from the jolt.

My mom bought me my own horse,
So I wouldn't "borrow" another colt.

Trespassing

My three friends, Debbie, Vicki, Sherri, and I stopped our steeds and looked around us. Amazed, we realized that we had ridden onto the edge of a golf course. Who builds a golf course in the middle of a pasture? Now, at eleven and twelve years old, we would ride for miles without looking around while laughing and singing off key at the top of our lungs. We pretty much let our horses pick the way. After all, who cares where we are going when we have the whole day on our horses without anyone telling us what to do or where to go? Saturdays and Sundays were release days for my three friends and me; our horses were our best friends and favorite mode of transportation.

Our horses were stabled at Fort Carson, Colorado, and we four girls were military dependents. My stepfather, Vicki, and Sherri's fathers were sergeants, but Debbie's father was a colonel. Rank did not mean anything to us--we were the four musketeers; all that mattered was that we were all horse lovers and extremely adventurous. "Army brats"-- as military dependents were called-- have to make friends easily and quickly, for their fathers are always being stationed elsewhere within a year or so. Our love of horses brought the four of us together. Vicki, Sherri, and I could have been sisters. We were all tall and lanky with light brown to blond, stringy hair. Debbie, on the other hand, was tiny with dark auburn hair. When we first saw her, we thought she was much younger than us because she was so petite. Her mare, Velvet, was a big mare, but Debbie had no trouble getting on her, even bareback; she would wiggle up the patient mare like a monkey climbing a tree. Vicki rode a nice mare named Cindy; she was a registered quarter horse--the only horse of the four with papers. Sherri rode the only gelding, a big palomino named Tango, and I rode a little roan paint mare named Sugar.

We were all riding bareback since it takes too long to saddle; we loved the freedom of riding without any restrictions. The four of us had been riding since early in the morning, spending most of the day on the trails up and around Cheyenne Mountain wading through streams, racing through the pastures, and navigating the hills. Even at this tender age, we had a great respect for landowners until this fateful day. Traveling through the mountains, we would ride until we hit a fence, then we would follow it until we found a gate to enter. We were always incredibly careful to remember to close and latch the gate. We never went near any grazing livestock.

It was late in the evening when we drifted down off of the mountain headed for home. We were content to let the horses mosey their way toward the stables, nibbling on the tall lush grass at the base of the mountain. We were getting close to Fort Carson when I noticed the grass was getting pretty short; in fact, it was mowed. I looked up and realized we were not in a pasture any longer. What the devil was this place? A golf course! Who the heck puts a golf course in the middle of a pasture? The Stratton Hills Golf Course people—that's who. We pulled up and sat admiring the beautifully sculptured landscape--then my foolish side came into play.

“Let's put one hoof print on this green; it looks so soft and smooth,” I said as I urged my little mare, Sugar, toward the green. None of the others said anything as I approached the green. I was planning on only putting a single hoof print on the edge of the sculpted grass, but sometimes Sugar had a mind of her own, especially at the end of the day when she was tired. When I pulled back and tried to stop with one footprint, she grabbed her bit and bolted across the pristine circle. At first her bolt startled me, but then I relaxed and felt her powerful muscles carrying me across the cushioned turf. It was exhilarating to feel the wind blowing through my loose hair. Behind me I could hear the other three girls whooping and hollering as they also ran

across the green. Well, that let the dogs out! I truly cannot tell you how many greens we galloped across, but it was more than two or three. We were spirits floating across the green sea, dancing from green to pristine green. After we slowed down, still laughing and out of breath, I spotted a man in a black overcoat walking toward us.

“Hey! Let’s get out of here!” I yelled as I urged Sugar into a run.

I bent low over her neck and encouraged her to stretch out. Suddenly we were wild Indians escaping the clutches of the cavalry; I could feel Sugar’s taut muscles working beneath me as we ran headlong off the course and down the hill into the now native, uncut foliage. The others streaked along behind me, whooping and screaming, leaving the solitary man standing on the trampled golf course. Riding straight toward the military stables, which were a couple of miles away, we left the golf course and traversed down a little jeep trail heading toward our refuge. Reaching the bottom of the long hill, we stopped and slipped off of our hard-breathing horses. We began to laugh hysterically; we had escaped! What an adrenaline rush! We were breathing almost as hard as our horses. There was no way the man in the overcoat could keep up with our fleet footed friends. The four of us were doubled over, laughing so hard we were almost crying. About the time we were laughed out, I looked up and saw a long black car coming slowly over the hill down the jeep trail. That definitely did not belong there!

“Crap! Somebody’s coming! Let’s get out of here!” I shouted as I vaulted up on my mare. Vicki and Debbie made it up onto their horses, but Sherri could not get up on her tall palomino, Tango. Vicki, Debbie, and I galloped madly to the top of the hill, stopped our horses, and watched poor Sherri still struggling to get mounted. The man in the black car drove up beside her and got out, approaching our struggling friend.

Sorry to say, we got tickled watching her try to get on her horse. It really was a comical scene. That man stood there chewing Sherri out, and she just kept jumping up and down trying to get back on that big yellow horse of hers. We started laughing--loudly. The longer we watched, the funnier it seemed. We just could not quit. After what seemed like ages, the man got back in his car, and Sherri finally got up on Tango. We were still laughing hysterically when she rode up...bawling her eyes out. Poor Sherri was still crying so hard she could hardly talk. Her red, tear stained face and inability to speak immediately destroyed our jovial mood. We turned our horses and walked slowly toward the stables. It took a while, but Sherri finally calmed down enough to talk.

She told us that the man in the overcoat said we were in a lot of trouble, and he knew where we kept our horses. He was going to find out our names and call our parents. We were going to have to pay for the damages we did to the golf course. Every time he quit yelling, he would hear us laughing our heads off and then get real red faced and start screaming again.

After the initial shock, we formulated a plan to sell our saddles and tack and pay for the grass. We decided it could not cost a lot just to fix a few little holes, could it? We all agreed it would be okay. It was almost sunset as we made the last leg of our journey. Entering the head of the road to the stables, we saw Bill--the head cowboy and assistant stable manager-- and another cowboy slowly heading our way. We knew we were in deep trouble when Bill stopped and stood angrily in the middle of the road, arms crossed at his chest and legs planted, so we could not avoid him. I could feel the blood draining out of my face as I saw the set of his jaw and the squint of his eyes. I looked around at my friends and saw they were just as frightened of this kind giant as I was. I swore to myself right then that I would never do such a dumb thing again.

He told us to put our horses up and wait for him in the tack room in a voice we had never heard him use toward us. Never before had we seen Bill angry; we were his “pets” and could get him to do about anything we asked him. Not today--we could tell he was trying hard to control his temper. Barely able to think, we put the horses in their stalls and shuffled toward the tack room. Bill was not there. We bunched together for support; my heart felt like it was going to pound out of my chest. Debbie was already starting to cry as she was the baby of our group. We had never angered Bill before and did not have a clue what to expect.

Bill kept us waiting forever; it felt like hours had passed when we finally heard the familiar jingle of his spurs. He stepped into the tack room and stared at us; the once friendly, smiling soul became 6’5” of a very scary man. Instinctively we huddled even closer together for protection. Debbie began to cry loudly, and I felt like I was going to barf.

His usually calm voice exploded, and he said he had just gotten off the phone with the manager of the Stratton Hills Golf Course. The man asked him if four girls riding without saddles belonged to this stable. He told him yes, and then the angry man informed Bill that four little hellions went running all over his golf course tearing up the greens. The angry cowboy demanded to know if we had any idea how much damage we had done and then told us it was going to cost hundreds of dollars to fix what we tore up. He stood there, hands on his hips and asked us what our parents were going to think of this mess. He also told us that the mess was not over yet because Hugh (the manager) was due back from sick leave, and the boss wasn’t going to be nearly as easy on us as he was. With that, he spun around on his heel and stormed out of the tack room, leaving us to our own panicked thoughts. I could not speak. Slowly Bill’s words filtered through my shocked brain. Hundreds of dollars? My stepdad was just a sergeant, and I had been raised to understand that money was tight and owning a horse was a luxury that we

really could not afford. There was no way my parents would or could let me keep my horse after this; we would have to sell her to pay off my stupidity. I just wanted to crawl into a hole and pull the dirt in over me. Then a plan began to formulate in my childish brain. We were all bawling and scared to death.

“I don’t know about you guys,” I sniffed, “but my parents can’t pay for anything like that. I know what we can do! If we aren’t here, they can’t make our parents pay for anything. I’m taking Sugar and running away. I’m going to go live on the Mary Ellen Ranch or in the mountains. No one will bother us there, and our parents won’t get into any trouble.”

My fellow troublemakers quickly agreed; none of them wanted to face the wrath of their parents. We quickly went and got our horses out of their stalls, saddled them, and tied all of our brushes, curry combs, and paraphernalia onto our saddles. We were headed out the door into the darkening night when Bill rounded the corner into our barn. The shocked cowboy almost ran into me leading my little mare and demanded to know just where the heck we thought we were going when it was dark outside. “We’re leaving,” I blubbered. “Our parents can’t pay for what we did, and if they can’t find us, they won’t take our horses away. We’re gonna go live in the mountains,” I stammered through my tears.

Bill caved; he could not stand the sight of four sniffing little girls packed up and ready to run away from home. He broke down and told us that the manager of the golf course was not going to press charges this time, but if we ever did anything like that again, they would throw the book at us. He said he told us what he did because he wanted to scare us and make us understand how stupid and irresponsible we were to do what we did. I nearly fainted from relief. I did not understand what my three friends were jabbering about behind me, but I was never so relieved in

my life to hear Bill's words. A lesson! He was teaching us a lesson! We did not have to sell our horses or run away with them. We nearly ran to unsaddle and put the confused horses back in their stalls for the night.

Two weeks later, our German stable manager, Hugh, came back from sick leave. He had broken his leg and after recovery, he returned on a cane. We thought everything was forgotten concerning our escapade at the golf course. We were wrong!

"You girls meet me in the tack room in ten minutes," was all he said the first morning we saw him back. Cautiously we looked at each other and headed toward the tack room where once again, we found ourselves sitting---waiting. We huddled together for support and comfort. It was a warm spring day, and as we sat waiting, I could not help but notice the sunlight streaming through the small window. Little particles of dust danced on the sunbeam. None of us spoke; we were lost in our own terrible thoughts. Hugh kept us waiting a lot longer than Bill had weeks ago, leaving us to stew and worry about what was going to happen. As I watched the dancing dust, I heard a distinct step, thump, step, thump; Hugh was heading into the tack room. He exploded as soon as he hit the doorway. We had seen the little German angry before, but never at us. His face was almost purple.

He lowered his voice to nearly a growl and told us that the commanding officer of the fort called him as soon as he arrived at the stables and chewed his backside for four little girls doing hundreds of dollars of damage on a public golf course. He raised his voice a notch as he said that was a heck of a way to come back to work after being laid up for eight weeks! He demanded to know what the blazes we were thinking and how we could do something so irresponsible and destructive? He went on to say that if we were his daughters, he would beat us

within an inch of our lives. At this, he took a menacing step toward us. He stopped, clenched his fists, and growled that we would not be able to sit on a horse for six weeks. He took a step back and told us he was not going to touch us this time, but if we ever, ever did something like that again, he would take his cane to us. He made us all tell him we understood, and we would never pull a stunt like that again. We were so scared we could barely get the words out of our mouths, but we all agreed and promised never to misbehave again. He definitely made his point. At that moment even though I was terrified, I wished he was my father because I recognized that the reason he was so angry was because he considered us his children. Oh, to be loved and disciplined by a real father. I envied my friends more than ever at that point.

We never rode on a golf course again; in fact, we were extremely careful not to even ride on any grass that had been mowed. I have no idea why the golf course did not press charges. After the fact, we decided that because there were no signs posted against trespassing, the golf course had no legal recourse; besides that, were they going to throw four skinny little wild women in jail? I cannot remember if our parents were even told; it does not seem like any of us missed any riding time.

Betty Big Boobs

It was the dog days of summer, and things had been pretty boring around the stable. We had ridden in the mountains for two days running, so we decided to hang out at the stables for the day and give our horses a rest. We were sitting in our usual place in front of our barn trying to decide how we could spend the day and stay out of trouble. The air was so still that we could hear the buzz of the flies circling around the horses' ears even though they were tied five feet from us. The horses would bob their heads up and down and shake them, trying to escape the pests.

“Hey, I think I saw Betty Big Boobs head for the hay barn a while ago; let's go see if we can flush her and her doggie out,” quipped Sherri.

Poor Betty! She was a chaplain's daughter and lots older than us; she must have been at least seventeen or eighteen, which to us seemed really old! Besides that, she was heavy set, very well endowed, and wore lots of makeup, tight pants and blouses, and her hair was done all of the time. We didn't think she belonged anywhere close to a riding stable. I will never forget the first time she came to the stable. A silver car drove up in front of the barn and stopped. We watched the passenger lean over and give the driver a kiss on the cheek and open the door to get out. The first part of her to emerge was a chubby leg covered with skin tight leopard print pants. No boots, just canvas shoes. She wiggled out of the car with a “bye Daddy, pick me up in a couple of hours, okay?” to the driver and stood up with a big armed stretch. Then she looked to the left and to the right, gave us a big smile and said, “Do you little girls know how I can rent a horse? Who do I talk to?” Little girls? Strike one! We stood looking at the strange girl, not believing that she thought we were just *little girls*. After all, we were *almost* teenagers. I finally spoke up.

“Uh, this is the private horse barn, you want the barn two buildings down with the horses tied out front,” I managed to choke out.

We couldn't believe what we were seeing. She must have been at least a double “D” and was squeezed into the tightest shirt we had ever seen. She thanked us, spun on her heel, and strutted down toward the rental barn. We exchanged looks, glanced down at our boyish chests, and burst out laughing.

We decided to follow the newcomer down to the barn where two or three GIs were getting mounted. Unfortunately, as youngsters, we did not have much respect for the men serving in uniform except for our fathers. Everyone called the GIs “doggies” at that time. We were too young to flirt with them, but we were not above giving them lots of grief. Now, Betty, whose name we learned later, on the other hand, was constantly chasing after the young men that came to ride the stable horses kept for rental.

As we sidled up to the rental barn, the head cowboy, Bill, told me to go catch Muley, who was a freak of nature. You see, mule mares are sterile, but Muley's mama beat the odds and got herself bred to a horse and produced the cutest cross between a mule and a horse you have ever seen. He was really big, had a pretty nice head, and his ears were just a little too big for a horse, but not big enough to be called mulish. When Bill told me to catch Muley, I looked wisely at the others, and they burst into laughter. I guess Bill thought she might need a large horse also. Besides that, Muley was the sweetest horse on the rental string, and we all loved him. While I was getting her horse, she was having a flirty conversation with the two GIs who were already mounted. I led her horse out, and she simply took the reins and said that she was going to walk a while and get to know him; we just giggled and watched her lead ole Muley down the road.

A week or so later found us sitting in the shade of the barn watching the flies drone over our horses' heads. It was a hot, breezeless day with nothing going on, so tiring of watching the horses stomp flies, we decided to go to the hay barn and play on the rope hanging from the rafters. We would gallop by and grab the rope and swing off our bareback horses. We never had a problem catching the horses after we swung down; they would just go to the end of the open barn and graze on the loose hay.

We loped down the road to the haybarn, laughing and yeehawing all the way. Our dull day had suddenly gotten a lot more interesting...little did we know just how interesting it was going to get! I got to the rope first, flew by and grabbed a hold of it. Suddenly, I was airborne! Sugar's slick back slid beneath me as I rose into the air! Swinging back and forth I felt like Peter Pan flying above the hay covered floor. The warm air blew into my face; the sweet smell of freshly cut hay filled my nostrils as I finally slowed down enough to drop to the floor. I jumped out of the way as Sherri came bearing down on me.

"Clear the way! Tango express coming down! Woo Hoo!" she screamed. One by one, we took our turn on the rope. When Debbie had taken the last turn, we started looking for our horses. They were gone! Normally, they would run a little way and stop to eat, but they were nowhere to be seen. Thinking they probably went around to the end of the barn; we giggled our way to find them. As we rounded the corner, we heard a horse's high-pitched squeal. The foursome was not at the end of the barn. We exchanged concerned looks and headed around to the other side of the barn. When we got there, we were shocked to see two of the stable horses sniffing noses with Tango. Now Tango was snorting and squealing at the stable horse and threatening to start a full-scale war. Sherri was fearless as she rushed in and grabbed Tango's reins and flapped her arms at the offending stable horses. When horses meet each other for the

first time, it can be quite explosive. There is always a dominant horse, and the squealing, striking, and sometimes kicking is how they decide who will be the leader. Our horses were way past that stage; they spent so much time together they were friends much like we were. We called out trying to find the riders of the stray horses, but getting no answer, we gathered up our horses and rode back to the barn, leading the two strays. Bill and Hugh, were nowhere to be found, so we just tied the horses up and went back to our fun on the rope. This time we simply sidled up to the haybarn, still wondering about the mystery of the two extra horses. Silence greeted us; the hay was stacked high and neatly with rows upon rows reaching toward the rafters. There was no sign of anyone around except us. Each of us secretly worried we might find out something terrible had happened to the riders. Our young imaginations were galloping along nearly as fast as our horses could run.

We cautiously approached the now still rope and looked around in silence. Our horses sensed our hesitation and walked slowly up to the rope and stopped. We quietly inched our way around to the other side of the barn, not speaking a word. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest and felt sweat trickling down my face. Sugar sensed my fear and walked as if she were on eggs. The others followed silently behind me. I rounded the corner and stopped. The others stopped beside me.

Way up above us in the hay we heard a sound. It was a sound we had never heard before; it was just a series of high-pitched squeals and grunts. We looked at each other in bewilderment. The noises overhead were getting louder. Now we could hear a girl and a guy talking and laughing. They were far enough above us that we could not make out what they were saying, but we could tell that no one was injured or in danger up there; there was too much giggling going on. We rode our horses to the other side of the barn and slid off of them and formed a circle

to prepare our strategy. All of our fear vanished as we slipped into “detective” mode. Between us, we decided to climb up the haystack and see who was up there. We tiptoed around the end of the barn and stopped to listen. Once again, my heart was beating so loudly I thought everyone could hear it. I was so keyed up; I couldn’t hardly catch my breath. We found a spot to climb up and cautiously started the ascent. There were enough missing bales that we had no problem shimmying up the haystack. As we got higher, the voices got louder.

“Shhhh, come here....shhh.” I motioned to the others to wiggle in next to me. We settled into a spot in the hay that we could all fit in and froze. We could hear the voices much better from our hiding spot. We waited. Nothing. The hay smelled so sweet and it was so peaceful in our little hideout, I promised myself that we would make this a permanent hideout for us.

All of a sudden, I realized whose voice we were hearing... “Oh my gosh...it’s Big Boobs!” I hissed. My pronouncement instituted a round of smothered giggles from my companions. Once again, I hissed at the giggling group to be quiet.

Abruptly something in my mind told me we should not be there. Memories of unpleasant afternoons with my oldest brother flooded my brain. My mother’s closed bedroom door and subdued voices from within echoed in my brain. The others gave me a questioning look when I motioned them to be quiet and start down the haystack, but they sensed my mood and followed me down the hay anyway. We got to the bottom of the haystack and returned to our munching horses. The desire to swing from the rope had left us; we mounted our horses and rode slowly back to the barn. Our discovery brought back memories I struggled to bury every day. All of my bravado left me quiet, and I was depressed. Dark thoughts were circling in by brain like buzzards flying over a dead animal.

“Well, now we know why Betty doesn’t ride her horse.” I said quietly.

We rode solemnly back to the barn, lost in our own thoughts. I did not know what the others were thinking, but I was sure they did not have the dark thoughts I was experiencing. They had two parents, and their mothers did not work, so they were not unsupervised as my brothers and I were. As we sat outside our barn, the couple came walking down the dirt road with no idea where their horses were. We were sitting on our corral fence like four birds in a row and watched them come strolling up the road in search of their missing mounts. Hugh and Bill were lounging outside the rental horse barn and gave each other a sly look and smile as the embarrassed pair came asking for their horses. The two men asked innocently how the couple happened to lose their horses, and Betty just glared at the pair and stammered around making excuses while her fella grinned and shook his head. We sat and watched this little scene play out and suddenly got tickled watching poor Betty and her doggie trying to explain how they came to be afoot. We tried not to laugh out loud, but the harder we tried not to laugh, the harder it was NOT to laugh.

“Shhhh, they’re looking at us. Come on, we’d better leave; let’s go to the back of the barn,” I said hopping down off of the fence.

We left the front of the barn unceremoniously and broke into loud laughter. Betty gave us an evil look; the cat was out of the bag. We knew she knew, but by now we had a victim. From that time on, poor Betty was our target. Whenever she would come to the barns and we happened to be there, we would patiently wait for her to find a fella (a different one each time), and we’d give them plenty of time to get busy in the hay. Then we would ride down and make as much noise as we possibly could to flush them out. Usually, the guy would pop his head up, see

us, and then gather Betty up and leave. If the couple tried to hide, we would actually call Betty's name...eventually she quit trying to have her trysts at the barn. When Betty quit coming around, we found other ways to torture the poor GIs that were just trying to enjoy a pleasant horseback ride on a sunny afternoon. That was my friend's introduction into boy/girl fun in the hay. Back in that time, the early 60s, sex was not a topic that girls our ages knew much, if anything, about, except for me and my dirty little secret. The accidental discovery of Betty and her GI was their introduction. They did not really know what was going on for sure and were too scared and embarrassed to actually spy on the couple; in fact, it was hard for all of us to look Betty in the eyes for about a week. I had a good idea what was going on, but I chose not to share; I did not want anyone to know my shame.

Morning Ritual on the Farm

The sun comes up
peering through the windows
and erases sleep from your eyes.

It's time to feed the critters,
but first to the kitchen and start
the coffee.

Pull on muck boots,

No need to dress.

Critters don't mind

a housecoat,

and the nearest neighbor

drinks all night

and sleeps all day.

The horse nickers as you walk toward the barn.

The sun warms the floor,

and around you sweet barn smells drift into your nostrils.

"Yeah, yeah I'm coming, don't be impatient, Shorty."

The gray horse head peers out over his stall gate,

nodding up and down for breakfast.

Outside the goat bleats and bangs

against the side of her house--

a doghouse, but the dog is gone.

The chickens cluck, and the lone duck
quacks.

“Darn, they’re sure impatient
in the morning” you say.

Throw the hay, track down the feed
bucket the bored horse shifted again,
“Shorty, you are a pain in the rear;
I shouldn’t even give you grain.”

The patient intelligent eyes
gaze back from his slick black face.

Dump the supplement
into the grain.

Give him a pat on the rear
to say good boy for not kicking.

Lock the gate.

Gather the goat hay and head
for the goat and birds.

The grateful goat bites you,
not hard, but sharp on your bare leg, her way
of saying thanks.

You head to the chicken coup.

The chickens fly by your head

as you open the coup door.

You smell the heavy stench of the chicken house
even in the coolness of the morning.

You feel the power in their wings
as they fly by.

The door open, now they can forage all day.

You hope some stinkin' town dog
doesn't wander in and kill them for fun.

Encounter With...What?

As the summers stretched out, my riding buddies and I branched out and started riding with other friends who did not stable their horses at Fort Carson. It was around 10:00 am, and we could not think of anything or anyone to harass as it was a lazy summer Thursday morning. No one came to the stables during a weekday except us girls; at twelve and thirteen now, we were still madly in love with our horses and the freedom they offered us. We were terribly bored, so we decided to look up a friend of ours that had moved her horse to her new house, five miles from our stables. Riding five miles was nothing to us; we could put ten or fifteen miles on our horses in half a day. Bren Storm wasn't as adventurous as we were on our horses, and her parents wouldn't let her ride across the freeway, so if we wanted to ride with her, we had to go to her parent's farm on the edge of Security, Colorado.

After I called Bren, we came up with a game plan to solve our boredom problem. I told the others that Bren said there was a dance at the neighbor, Fuzzy's, that Friday night, and she wanted us to spend the whole weekend with her. They had plenty of room for our horses, and we could sleep in the bunkhouse, which was nestled in a tree grove behind the main house. There was going to be a full moon, and after her parents fell asleep, we could slip out and ride to the reservoir and tell ghost stories.

Fuzzy's name was Fritz, but he had a bushy white Santa beard, so everyone just called him Fuzzy. He and his wife, Dot, were very gracious people and had the neatest big white barn with a huge hayloft and box stalls full of valuable show horses. He played the fiddle, and we could all try to square dance; it promised to be a great time. We could hardly contain our excitement running toward the stable office.

We took turns calling our parents and cementing the weekend plans. Debbie was disappointed because her parents wouldn't let her go, but Vicki, Sherri, and I got permission to go, so we spent the rest of the day visiting about the weekend excitement and planning on what we needed to take with us for the horses. Deb was afraid we would be angry because she could not go, but she was almost a whole year younger than us, and we reassured her that we were definitely not upset.

Friday morning dawned clear and beautiful. We all showed up early and packed our brushes, curry combs, hoof picks, and halters. After we saddled the horses, we rode down the road waving goodbye to poor lonesome Debbie sitting on the fence outside of the barn. Even though we felt a twang of regret at having to leave her, once we were out of sight of the barn, our moods changed for the better.

We arrived at the Storm's farm mid-morning and found places for our horses. Vicki and Sherri put Cindy and Tango in two empty stalls, but Sugar had to stay in the old chicken coup since she was the smallest and quietest of the three horses. The chicken coup was about eight feet long, six feet wide, with eight-foot walls made of chicken wire. The only way to get her into the pen was through a walk-through gate for humans, which was a pretty good squeeze for a normal horse but worked well for her. We latched the door behind her and then tied some hay twine around the post and door in case she chose to nudge around on the gate.

The dance at Fuzzy's was a blast; even though we were pretty young, we did not feel out of place. The older kids included us in the fun, and we all took turns trying to square dance on our shorter legs and two left feet. When we were not trying to dance, we snacked on the many varieties of food on the long tables. People watching was also a plus; we watched the older kids

flirt and smooch as they danced. As the dance was winding down, however, a fierce storm moved in. We piled into Bren's brother's pick up, five of us squashed into a single cab and made the short trip from Fuzzy's house to Bren's, which was situated at the end of a long lane. The thunder and lightning were horrific, and the rain was pouring down so hard we could not hardly see the road. With five of us in the cab, the windows and windshield fogged up very quickly. Doug turned up the defogger as high as it would go, and it quickly got very hot in the cab.

As we crept down the lane trying desperately to see, something white ran across the drive and behind the house. Doug slowed down even more and increased the speed of the windshield wipers; "what the hell..." The white creature came tearing around the house again...it was my little mare, Sugar!

I screamed at Doug to stop the truck and jumped out of the truck as soon as it slowed down enough to allow me to climb over the bodies crammed in the small cab. I headed in the opposite direction that the panicked mare was running. The drive made a circle around the house, so instead of trying to run her down, I was going to try and cut her off. The rain was coming in sheets, but I didn't even notice. I heard her barreling toward me before I could see her; she was coming fast! "Whoa, Sug, whoa baby," I hollered above the roar of the wind. I flapped my arms and jumped up and down to stop the panicked mare. She flew by me, nostrils flared, eyes wild, dripping wet. I cut across the yard, heading for the back side of the house to try and cut her off. Meanwhile Doug had driven up and was blocking her path with his truck. I could hear her thundering hooves splashing toward me. "Sugar, whoa, whoa, whoa baby, whoa," I cried as she came closer. This time she actually saw me and slid to a stop almost hitting me. "Good girl, good girl, that's my baby...easy, easy, that's my girl, it's okay, whoa now, whoa now." I slipped the halter onto the terrified mare and realized she was trembling all over. "Oh, gawd, Sug, what's

happening? What's wrong? Easy sweetie, easy; it's alright, easy, easy," I crooned to the terrified mare as I stroked her sweating body. Even though she was soaked from the rain, I could feel heat radiating from her terrified body. There was steam rising off of her back, and she was shaking like a leaf. I broke down in tears, "What's wrong, Sug, what happened to scare you so bad?"

Doug approached slowly so as to not scare her anymore. He had never seen me cry before--I was not a crier, and he did not know quite what to think. By now, Vicki and Sherri were standing shivering in the slowing rain. About that time, Bren's dad drove up and demanded to know why we had that mare out and were standing in the middle of the road in the storm. I could barely hear everyone trying to talk at once telling him what had transpired. All I could do was cry. I wanted the bad to be gone; I wanted a grownup to make things better.

Bren's dad came over to me and reassured me that Sugar would be fine. He tried to tell me he would walk her, and I needed to go into the house, but I told him I would take care of her because she was my responsibility, and she was scared of men. Bren's dad could be quite rough at times; he was a construction boss and used to giving orders and being obeyed. He spoke sharply to the other four and they skittered into the house, then he and I walked the mare slowly in circles. Mr. Storm was not much of a talker, but I did not feel uncomfortable with him. He asked me if we latched the gate behind us and emphasized that we needed to pay attention when we were putting horses away. I could sense that he thought it was my fault that my mare got out of the pen, but I was too afraid of him to argue. He went to the house and called the neighbors, the Barnes's, and then we walked Sugar down the lane to their house and put her safely in a warm stall. We got back to the house where Bren's mom had some hot cocoa and popcorn ready for us. Everyone else was dry and cozy in their jammys, and Bren's mom ushered me into Bren's room to put on dry clothes. I came back into the kitchen and joined the others; we were

too exhausted to say much. It was like someone had knocked me down and stomped on me; I was exhausted. All I wanted was to find a nice warm bed and sleep...forever. It was too cold to spend the night in the bunkhouse, so we scattered around the house and crashed. Two of us slept in Bren's room while the other two slept on the couches in the living room.

The next morning dawned clear and bright. Even though we had been up super late, we bounded out of bed when we heard Bren's parents rooting around in the kitchen. Our moods immediately brightened up thinking of the fun day ahead of us.

"Wow! That was some storm last night, huh?" I said as I trundled through the kitchen heading for the door to go check on Sugar.

Mrs. Storm stopped me and insisted that I eat breakfast; Mr. Storm reassured me that he had called the neighbor and my little mare was fine. Relieved, I sat down to eat realizing I was famished. There were platters of not only pancakes but also sausage, scrambled eggs, and pitchers of orange juice and milk. We finished off the delicious breakfast, cleaned up the kitchen, made our beds, and then went out to investigate the damage Sugar must have done to the chicken coup in her panic to get out. I still could not imagine her being so scared that she would run through that chicken wire.

"Wow, I sure hope Sugar didn't tear up the chicken coup too much last night. My mom will pay whatever it costs to fix it," I stated on our way to the pen, secretly worrying about how my mom could afford another expense. Graciously, Bren assured me that the chicken pen was never used, and her parents wouldn't expect me to fix it. As we rounded the corner to inspect the damage, we all came to an abrupt halt bumping into each other because of the sudden stop. We looked with disbelief at the chicken pen; there was not a wire out of place. Everything was in

perfect order...except the pen was empty; the gate was even still tied shut with the hay twine. Nothing looked amiss; if that mare had run through or climbed over that wire, it would have been destroyed. We stood stock still and stared at the pen, transfixed.

“What the heck? Someone must have turned her loose and tied the gate back shut,” I stammered when I finally found my voice.

Bren inspected the twine on the gate and insisted no one could have tied the knots exactly the way she did. Looking for tracks, we scoured the ground around the pen, but because of the dead leaves and old forage, we found nothing. The only prints we could find were Sugar’s going INTO the pen; there was absolutely no evidence of anything or anyone around the outside of that pen. There was no way she could have jumped the fence either; she was way too short, and there was not enough room to get a run. The mystery was...how did she get out?

After snooping around for a few more minutes, we decided it was a waste of time, and we wanted to get on with our adventure. While the others gathered their horses, I took off at a run heading for the Barnes’s to get Sugar. I made it, thanked Mr. Barnes for taking care of Sugar, and rode back to Bren’s house just as she caught her gelding, Jack.

After mounting up, we thundered out of the barnyard and down the lane squealing like a bunch of wild banshees. There were only four places between us and the blacktop, so it was a short sprint. We slowed down after the second house and pulled up to a trot. The horses were still pretty excited and danced around when we got to the road. We stopped to cuss and discuss and decide whether to go to “Little Johnson or Big Johnson.” Little Johnson was a small reservoir on the other side of a wide, deep channel a couple of miles from Bren’s house. Big Johnson, on the other hand, was a huge reservoir about ten miles from where we were. Both places were fun

rides, but we never took the horses into the reservoirs; we would let them get a drink, and then they would graze while we played and splashed at the edge of the water. We wouldn't venture too far from the edge as none of us were really good swimmers, and it was against the law to swim there. We decided to go to Big Johnson and stop by another friend's house...Toni. Her parents owned a dairy farm, and it was always fun to see the milk cows and baby calves.

I started singing a goofy song, and the others joined in. We set off in a slow trot, chatting, singing, and giggling. It took us a couple of hours to get to Toni's house, and luckily, she was home and bored to death. As soon as we had the horses settled in, we camped out on the big wrap around porch and began a very strange visit.

Toni told us that there had been some really strange happenings around her farm, and her parents were nervous, therefore, making her stay close to the house. That wrecked our riding plans. She told us that there were some cows killed out on the pastures and some weird stuff at some of the barns around. We were all intrigued about the cow killings. Someone or something was killing only cows or heifers. It looked as though it was some type of ritualistic killing, which was making the country folk pretty nervous. Upon fevered questioning Toni told us that there had been a half a dozen killed, but thankfully, they were not their dairy cows because they did not turn them out on pasture. Three of their neighbors had lost cows. They were not shot; that was what was weird about it; they were just...dead. There had not been any steers or bulls killed, just the females. There was not a mark on them; they were just dead, and the reproductive parts and udders removed. We all got pretty excited and wanted to go see them, but Toni told us we could not because the police and the FBI came and took them away for autopsies. Those pastures were quarantined until they figured out what was going on. She also said that her dad would skin her alive if she went anywhere near there. After the first cow was found, she tried to sneak over

to the pasture on her horse one day and could not get her horse nor her dog close enough to see past the tape the cops put up. Her horse was scared to death, and her old dog, Bink, just growled and whined, tucked his tail between his legs, and hauled butt for the house. When she told her dad about that, he told her not to go near there or he would tan her hide. There had been five more killings since then. Still wanting to go to the reservoir, we asked her if there were any killings out that way. She reassured us that there weren't, but her father restricted her riding because he said whatever or whoever it was could be anywhere, so he's making her stay close to the place. He even put a loaded shotgun by the back door, Tony said in a lower tone.

We decided that we ought to forget about the reservoir due to the isolation of the place. There was no one living for miles around Big Johnson. "I thought country life wuz laid back and borin' until last night," I mused. Toni sat up straight, almost dumping us out of the swing, demanding to know what happened. We all started talking at once, filling her in on the details of Sugar's adventure. Through the garbled conversation, Toni figured out what we were telling her and let out a soft, low whistle. She could not believe that anything would come that close to town. So far, all that had happened had been in the isolated pastures, a couple of miles from the houses. All the talk about the strange happening spooked Bren and she thought we ought to call her dad and have him bring the trailer and haul us home. I pooh poohed her and told her that it was broad daylight, and whatever was doing the damage was probably miles away sleeping the day away. Skipping the ride to Big Johnson we headed for home before it got too late in the day.

Well, Toni's news ruined our once jovial mood, and we bridled our horses and rode slowly away from the safety of Toni's home. The ride back was subdued and pretty quiet as we were all lost in our own thoughts. I could not get enough of Sugar; I leaned forward every little bit and loved on her and petted her and crooned to her. I was so thankful that she was okay.

Sherri, Vicki, and Bren spent a lot of time bent over their horses' necks also; the close call with Sugar had affected all of us. We kept looking over our shoulders and tensing up at any little sound that jumped out of our heightened imaginations. I kept a close watch of Sugar's ears and squeezed my legs tight against her sides. If her muscles tightened, my heart would jump into my throat. The first couple of miles were ominous; we barely talked as we were so keyed up and nervous.

After a little while, I said softly, "ya know, the horses can sense and smell things we can't, and Sugar is totally relaxed now. Hmmm, don't think I'm crazy, but did you guys feel like someone was watching us when we first left Bren's?" My friends squirmed around on their horses, looking around, and we decided that I was just being paranoid. When we got back to Bren's house, Mr. Storm told me to take Sugar back to Barnes's place as we did not want a repeat of last night's adventure. I poked around putting Sugar in the stall and grooming her; I had never felt closer to the little mare. Her soft muzzle and big brown eyes melted my heart.

"Oh, Sugar, I am so glad to have you. Thank God you weren't hurt last night; I would die if anything happened to you. I wish you could talk and tell me how the heck you got out of that pen."

She dropped her muzzle into my hand as if to let me know she was listening. Big tears slowly fell from my eyes; my heart felt as if it would burst with the love I felt for my four legged friend. She raised her muzzle and softly touched my cheek; I loved the velvety touch on my face. I felt as if I could drown in her soft brown eyes.

Honk, Honk! The blare of Doug's pickup horn brought me out of my trance. "Come on slowpoke, Mom's got supper ready!" I heard him yell from the driveway. I was caught by surprise by his offer of a ride; I was soon to find out why he was so generous, and it was not a

good thing. Doug never had much to do with Bren's friends, and the offer for a ride was very unusual. Normally, he would offer a ride, and before Bren or I could get in the pickup, he'd flip us the bird and speed off laughing hysterically. This time, however, he waited for me to get in the truck before heading toward his house.

I was really amazed that Doug had shown up to get me; we were friends, but I was considered a pest as I was his sister's age. When I asked him what the occasion was that he'd offer me taxi service, he said his parents made him come and get me since it's almost dark; he added that something had really scared his parents that afternoon, and as soon as he got home from his friend's house, they told him to skedaddle down here and pick me up. Driving quickly down the lane, we were at the house before I could really collect my thoughts; the warm glow of the lighted kitchen window was the most welcome sight I had seen in a long time. What could possibly scare adults? Adults knew everything, and nothing rattled them.

Heading into the house, I suddenly had a cold chill, and all I wanted to do was get in that warm, safe kitchen. I looked around quickly upon reaching the porch...I could feel someone...or something...watching us. I almost knocked Bren down rushing through the door with Doug right on my tail.

"Oomph, I'm sorry," I stammered at my amazed friend. "I just got the weirdest feelin' that someone or something was out in the dark. Dang, all this scary stuff is getting to me."

Bren's dad was sitting at the kitchen table and perked up when he heard my announcement. He jumped all over the "scary stuff" and demanded to know what I was talking about and what mischief we had gotten ourselves into (we had a sullied reputation, you know). We all started talking at once, trying to fill him in on the dead cows, the unscathed chicken pen, our ride home...we sounded like a gaggle of geese trying to all talk at once.

Jumping to his feet, he slammed his hands down on the table, told us to hush, and then asked Bren to tell him just what the heck we were trying to say. Bren recounted all that had happened at Toni's ranch as her dad sat quietly listening. She also added the weird feeling we had of being watched on the way home.

Doug quietly chimed in recounting that he had experienced a weird feeling for a couple of weeks that something was "off" around the place. He thought maybe it was just his imagination, but things just weren't right. He had been hunting at Little Johnson for half of his life, and it had never been so...so...*deserted*...he said he could not even scare up as much as a cottontail. His old dog, Blue, refused to go with him anymore; Doug was convinced something had scared that dog badly! It used to be he could not keep that old dog from following him; but lately Blue would not even get into the truck for a cruise, spending most of his time hiding in the back of the hay shed.

Bren's dad sat quietly drinking his coffee, a concerned look on his face. Finally, he took a deep breath and told us that he had heard rumors of random cow killings, but since the police and newspapers had not said anything, he just thought it was talk. But on a visit to the Boy's Ranch that morning while working on an addition, one of the boys came running up to the house extremely excited and scared. Someone, or something, had been in the horse barn night before and torn things up pretty badly. There were not any horses injured, but the stall doors were ripped off the hinges, and the horses were turned loose. It took the better part of the day to find the horses, and when they did, most of them were so terrified that the boys could not hardly get a halter on them. They said there were signs of dried sweat on all of them, and they were miles from the ranch. My friends and I looked at each other and shivered, recalling the fiasco after the dance and the condition of my mare.

“Oh, wow, that sounds like what happened to Sugar. Why would someone do that?” I asked, feeling my heart pounding against my ribs. “But...nothing was broken in the chicken pen, so how did she get out?”

Mr. Storm remained calm and explained to us that animals can do amazing things when they are scared badly enough. He said he had looked at the pen and thought my little mare was so scared that she flat cleared that eight-foot fence. There could be no other explanation if we were sure the gate was not messed with. He got really serious and said if any of us, especially Doug, let that mare out as a joke, we had better confess immediately. We all started babbling at once that there was no way we would do that or *could* do that because we were at the dance.

Bren’s dad told us to calm down and said he did not think we would be that ornery, but he had to ask because he just could not wrap his head around all these strange happenings.

“Hey guys, it will all be okay, huh, Mr. Storm? This is just a mean joke played by someone, isn’t it?” I asked hopefully.

He shrugged his big shoulders, and Mrs. Storm quietly told us she did not think we needed to sleep in the bunkhouse anymore for a while. She also said she did not know who was at the bottom of the mischief, but we needed to stay inside and ride close to home for a while.

All of the scary talk was taking its toll. Vicki even asked Sherri and me if we thought Hugh or Bill would come get us and our horses that evening and wanted to call them right then since it was only 9:30. Many summer nights the two cowboys stayed at the stables until well after 10:00 pm. Bren’s father assured us that no one was going to hurt our horses, and we did not need to call anyone for a ride. He reminded us that all of the nonsense had happened miles away from their house, and he had already called the sheriff who was coming within the hour to discuss the strange happenings of the night.

Standing up brusquely and moving toward the stove with determination, Mrs. Storm told the guys to check on the horses and the old dog and directed us girls to wash up and set the table. She also stated gruffly that if this was somebody's idea of a joke, it was pretty sick, and if she ever got a hold of him, she would show him what being scared really felt like.

Doug and his dad came in smiling and laughing saying that the horses were fine. Mr. Storm had met with Sheriff Duncan out in the driveway. The sheriff was convinced that there were some kids from the high school causing problems in the country, and we were not to panic. The FBI was investigating the cattle slaughter and would keep him posted. Mr. Storm turned to us and said we needed to relax and just stay close to home for a while...with a wink, he told us no more midnight rides.

You could have knocked Bren and me off our chairs with a feather; her dad KNEW we slipped out at night and rode our horses. How could he know that, and why did he never stop us? Mr. Storm started laughing; Bren and I just sat there with a dumb look on our faces.

Still laughing, he reminded us that Bren's mom and he were our ages once too. He used to sleep in the bunk house and sneak out after her grandparents were asleep, also. He just could not quit snickering at our shocked, embarrassed faces. When she finally found her voice, Bren asked her dad why he was not upset, and how long he had known we were sneaking out.

He asked her why he should be upset? He knew our horses were well broke and would not hurt us and then asked if we were doing something we would be ashamed of like drinking, smoking, or meeting boys.

We all assured him that we would not do any of those things. We just liked to go and sit under the big tree at Little Johnsons and tell stories. Shaking my head back and forth, I offered in a quiet voice thinking of committing any of those atrocities in my mother's eyes.

“My mom would kill me if I ever did anything like that,” I added. “Besides, my two stupid brothers smoke and drink, and that’s gross and dumb! We just like to watch the horses graze, stare at the stars, and try to scare each other.”

Mrs. Storm told us that was enough chatter and to eat supper; it was late, and we did not need any more conversations tonight; it had been a long day, and she was pooped. Once again, we spread around the house and settled in for the night. It had been a terribly long, stressful day, and we fell into a deep sleep at once. Thankfully, the night was uneventful, and we slept well. Bren’s dad was up before daylight checking on the horses and was quite cheerful when we wandered into the kitchen in search of food.

As he poured himself his third cup of coffee, he assured us that he had already fed and checked on the horses, and everything was fine. We could smell cinnamon rolls baking in the oven and hurried around to shower and get to the breakfast table. Bren asked her dad if she could ride to the freeway with us when we headed home promising not to cross and be really careful. We sat down to breakfast.

Bren’s mother started to protest, but Mr. Storm gave her a quick look and surprised us by saying he felt like riding himself, and his colt, Little Joe, needed a few miles on him. He continued saying that he would just join us as he had been hankering to get back in the saddle again anyway. Bren’s mom snickered at Mr. Storm and told him he was going to pay for his bright idea; he would not be able to walk for a week after being out of the saddle for so long. Bren laughed at her dad and told us he would really be sore if that ornery colt bucked with him like he used to. He had stood in the pasture for months, and we were in for a treat if he decided to put on a rodeo. We looked across the table at each other and grinned. Watching a grownup get bucked off or almost get bucked off was a treat for us. If we ever fell off or got thrown, we were

expected to jump up, dust ourselves off, and get right back on.

We snarfed down our breakfast, did the chores around the house, and headed for the horses. Doug graciously offered to give me a ride to the Barnes's house to get Sugar. He was really okay for a teenager and was pretty patient with his little sister and pack of friends. When we drove up to the barn, Mr. Barnes met us at the doorway. My heart skipped a beat when I saw him standing there; for a split second I was afraid he was going to say something had happened to my sweet mare. He greeted us with a big smile and said it was a fine day for a ride and that my little horse was raring to go. I jumped out of the truck with a quick thanks to Doug and hurried into the barn.

"Hey, Sug, how are you girl?" I asked as I opened the stall door. Sugar came to me with a little hello nicker and lowered her head for a scratch. I rubbed her foretop and felt a warm rush of emotion as she nuzzled my neck. I felt a lump in my throat and fought back tears for a second; my heart felt like it might burst with the love I felt for my four-legged friend. I haltered her, swung up on her back, thanked Mr. Barnes and Doug, and headed down the lane looking for my friends.

Bren was right about Little Joe; the second Mr. Storm sat down in the saddle, that colt took a big jump forward and tried to get his head down to buck. Now, Mr. Storm was a big man and not a really good rider, and for a split second we thought he was going to hit the ground. Somehow, he got himself righted, cussed the ornery horse, whipped on him a little, and we headed down the lane. That colt was sure stubborn; he tried everything under the sun to get his way. Bren's dad had his hands full down the lane, but then Joe must have gotten tired because he settled down and quit being such a fool. We were so busy watching the colt's shenanigans that we almost missed the excitement at Fuzzy's place. We were almost on top of Fuzzy's place

when we realized that there were police cars all over the place. Bren's dad pulled his horse to a stop and told us to wait at the head of the drive while he rode in and checked to see what was going on.

"Wow, I hope no one is hurt," I said as I stopped Sugar.

We could not just stand there gawking from the road, so against Bren's dad's orders, we eased into the driveway remaining a little way away from the barn. We were close enough to hear Fuzzy talking to the concerned Mr. Storm.

Fuzzy was shaking his head in amazement, proclaiming that he could not imagine who would do such a thing in his barn and that those show horses were worth a small fortune. If anything had happened to them, he--as a trainer--would be ruined. Half of them were contract horses that he showed for his quarter horse customers. He had never seen anything like this in his whole life and pointing to his dogs, he said they were worthless; when the ruckus started, they about knocked him down trying to get into the house when he opened his back door to see what all the hullabaloo was at the barn.

Bren's dad asked him what he heard, and the concerned man said it was like those horses were trying to bust out of their stalls. They were squealing and kicking the sides of the stalls, rearing up against the doors, and sliding back and forth across the stalls as fast as they could. He said he was lucky one of them did not break a leg. Every one of them were lathered up like he had been riding the heck out of them. Remembering Sugar, we all looked at each other in amazement. Talk about *Déjà vu!* Fuzzy went on to say that he had never seen a barn full of horses so scared in his life. At first, he thought there might be a fire, but when he ran down there and turned on the lights, there was absolutely nothing out of place. Now Fuzzy was a perfectionist, and every night he would rake the alleyway after chores so that he could tell if

anyone or anything entered the barn at night; well, that night was no different. He said he fell asleep in his chair watching the news, and the dogs went to barking and carrying on around midnight. At first, they were down at the barn, but by the time he got to the back door, they were on the porch whining and scratching at the door. When he opened the door, they bolted through with their tails tucked between their legs and ran into the bedroom; they almost knocked him down on their way through. He went to hollering at them trying to get them out of the house, but darned if they did not shimmy under the bed, and nothing was going to coax them out. Again, we looked at each other remembering Ole Blue's weirdness. He said it was the strangest thing he had ever seen; his dogs had never been afraid of anything! Their actions scared the daylights out of his wife, Dot. Anyway, when he ran down to the barn and switched on the lights, the horses were still skittish and blowing boogers. He shivered and shook his head saying it was what he saw on the dirt in the alleyway that turned his blood cold. He looked Mr. Storm in the eye and said that he was going to think he was crazy or drunk but assured him he was neither. At the end of the barn, plain as day, he saw a huge footprint. He said he was not talking big...he was talking HUGE. About ten feet on the other side of the alleyway was another, then another on the opposite side, and then one more right by the door on this end. He started for the barn telling Bren's dad to come and look for himself.

We had inched closer and closer until we could hear everything Fuzzy was telling Bren's dad. By the time he finished his story, we were off of our horses and following them to the barn. We did not get far, however, because a guy in uniform caught sight of us and immediately told us to stay away from the barn. Bren's dad heard him scolding us, turned around, and gave us a "what did I tell you look?" that would have wilted the bravest of souls. We skittered back on our horses and rode back up by the road where he had left us. Our minds and mouths were going

mile a minute. All we could do was jabber about what had happened at the Boy's Ranch barn and Sugar's mysterious escape.

"I bet that's what scared Sugar so bad...and Blue. Doug said he hasn't been the same since," I suggested in a whisper, "Fuzzy is just lucky his dogs were out. They must have scared whatever it was away, imagine what would have happened if those show horses had been let out like the horses at the ranch."

We started guessing about what could possibly have made those huge footprints. A giant, a prankster, and finally... Bigfoot. The others stared at me as the unspeakable came out of my mouth. Bigfoot was just a fairy tale, right? Besides that, they live in Montana or Alaska or somewhere like that, right? No, we argued, there was no such thing...we were nuts to even think of it; it had to be someone playing a mean prank like Sheriff Duncan told Bren's dad.

"Un, huh! There is such a thing. I saw a special one night by *National Geographic*, and there are pictures and everything. They do exist, but not here," I argued. "Who says they can't live here?" I continued. "They live in the wilderness, don't they? There's lots of empty land around here; maybe one of them got lost and came down here out of the mountains. He's probably lost and scared and doesn't know what to do or how to get back home."

Not wanting to even consider the thought, my friends all chimed in saying they did not believe in such a thing, and I was just trying to scare them.

I was in a zone, wanting to believe I had solved the mystery. "Not so!" I insisted, "I'm just as scared as you are, but think about it. What else could tear the doors off of a bunch of stalls? What else could scare the crap out of the dogs? Blue and Fuzzy's dogs are some of the best watch dogs in the country, and whatever made those footprints scared them so bad, they're worthless now. Something like that would scare a horse so bad that even a little shorty like Sugar

could clear a fence eight-foot-tall, like your dad said, Bren. It makes perfect sense!” I finished saying just as Mr. Storm rode back to us.

He started to lecture us about not listening to him, but then stopped cold and asked us just how much we snoopy kids did hear.

Bren could not contain herself and blurted out about the footprints and then asked her dad if it could be Bigfoot. Mr. Storm looked as if someone had slapped him upside the head and burst out laughing. Bigfoot?! He asked us how we could come up with such a foolish idea. The girls turned and looked at me.

“Well,” I said sheepishly, “I saw a special on TV, and they said Bigfoot is real. What else could make a footprint like that and scare the animals so bad?”

He snorted at me and said Bigfoot was the silliest thing he had ever heard. No such critter! Then he told us to come on that we needed to get back to the stables; the excitement was over. I swear I heard him say “Bigfoot” quietly to himself as he took the lead headed toward Fort Carson. “Bigfoot.”

Mr. Storm rode all the way to the stables with us, which we thought was great because Bren had never been allowed to cross the freeway with us, and we wanted her to meet Hugh and Bill. Upon arrival at the fort, Mr. Storm was introduced to Hugh and Bill after they came strolling down to meet us.

With a slight grin on his face and a wink at us, Hugh asked Mr. Storm if we had behaved ourselves or if perhaps, he rode back with us to make sure we never came back. Like I said before, our reputations were sullied by the long-ago golf course escapade; darn! When will that little man EVER let that die? Anyway, Mr. Storm assured Hugh and Bill that we had been perfect angels (almost anyway) and added that there was something he thought they needed to

know considering the stable had so many horses stalled there. Bren's dad told us to go about our own business and for Bren to help us put our horses away and water Little Joe and her horse, Jack, before they head back to the house. We started to protest, but he gave us "the look," and we scattered immediately.

We knew when to listen and when to beg; we immediately headed to our barn to unsaddle and put our tack away. We dawdled along and took our time watering Little Joe and Jack until the three men came around to find us. Hugh and Bill were both shaking their heads in disbelief. Apparently neither of them had heard any rumors concerning mischief with horse barns, but they had read something in the papers about cattle mutilations. Up until this time, they had not given that much thought; they were both down-to-earth cowboys who did not pay much attention to rumors and innuendo. Bren's dad shook Hugh and Bill's hands, swung up on his horse, and the pair kicked into a slow trot and headed home. We stood in front of Hugh waiting for a lecture; we were sure he was going to blame all of the excitement on us somehow; however, he suggested that we go sit in the tack room and have a little visit; we were a little nervous because a trip to the tack shed is where we always got chewed out, you know. He told us that he knew we liked to run the country and terrorize everyone around us, but he thought we needed to stay on base for a little while until people figured out what the heck was going on. We nodded our heads in unison. Suddenly our emotions spilled out; we started jabbering about how scared we were, and we did not ever want to have another scary weekend like that as long as we lived.

Bill calmly told us not to get in a panic simply because there had to be a logical explanation for all the strange things that had happened; they just wanted to make sure we paid attention to what we were doing and where we were going when out on our horses. We all agreed wholeheartedly and followed the cowboys out of the tack room.

We decided we needed to look for Debbie and fill her in on our adventures. Hanging back, I just stood in the doorway for a second drinking in the familiar smells and appreciating the feeling of being home...safe and sound. So much had happened in the last two and a half days. I drank in the sweet smell of alfalfa, clean straw, and pine stalls. The stalls were made of pine, so the horses would not chew on them, and the stable always smelled fresh. It felt so good to be back in our own world.

Vicki and Sherri were already in the corral looking for Debbie's horse, Velvet. Apparently, Debbie either was not coming to the stables that day or had already been and left, for Velvet was stretched out sunning herself. At first, we were disappointed that we had no one to share our adventure with, but then we decided that no one would believe us anyway. They would make fun of us and tell us we were either big liars or crazy, so we decided to keep it quiet for a while and see if anything weird happened. "Do you guys feel like this whole thing was a bad dream?" I asked Sherri and Vicki.

They nodded their heads in affirmation, and we meandered toward the benches lined up in front of the stables.

"I feel like I've been beaten up, do you?" I asked the others while we scuffed our way toward our favorite perch outside the barn. We sat in the shade outside the barn and slowly unwound. We all discussed the unbelievable events of the weekend and wondered if it was Bigfoot or some kind of monster. We dismissed the idea of a monster and started discussing Bigfoot once again.

"I think it could be true, but I thought they lived up in the high mountains. I wonder why it came down where there are people?" I said to myself looking around. My friends had nothing to add to the conversation. We were totally exhausted and had run out of steam. Our parents

came one by one to pick us up. For some reason--even as young as we were--we did not speak about our adventure to our parents at that time. I guess we really did not think they would believe us, or as I feared, they might not let us have the freedom we were used to. As I left the stables, I was reassured to see the evening sentry arrive to guard the stables all night. I slept very soundly that night.

Summer melted into fall without any more excitement. Sadly, Debbie's father was transferred to Washington state, so we lost her and Velvet. Vicki, Sherri, and I avoided riding to Security for the remainder of the summer, but Bren kept in touch and said that things had settled down after the excitement at Fuzzy's house. She also rode Jack awfully close to home; she said her dad was riding with her a lot more as he said the colt needed more saddle time.

School started, and Bren and I usually spent Friday and Saturday nights at her house in the bunkhouse. We were in junior high, so we stayed pretty busy during the week. That fall, I moved Sugar out of the Fort Carson stables because my mom divorced her latest husband, and I was no longer a dependent. Sherri and Vicki's fathers also got orders, so my tenure with the military base was over. Luckily, Mr. and Mrs. Barnes let me board Sugar at their place, and I got up early every morning and walked to the Barnes's and fed Sugar. After school I would do my chores around the house and then go feed her; many evenings I would slip a halter on her and ride in the neighbor's big pasture. Bren and I rode sometimes after school, but most of the time I rode by myself as I did not want to go home until I absolutely had to; Sugar was my sanctuary from an abusive home environment. As long as I got home before my mom did, I did not get into trouble. I had a list of daily chores, which I did diligently. If I did not do my chores, I was either strapped with a leather belt or, worse than that, restricted from my horse. I was always careful to get to the house first and even start supper to put my mom in a good mood.

We had not heard anything about the “visitor” for a long time, so Bren and I got a lot braver on our rides. We rode out to Toni’s several times, and the three of us ventured out to Big Johnson on three or four occasions. One Friday night, Bren, Toni, and I decided to spend the night in the bunkhouse. It was almost Halloween and unseasonably warm. After sitting in the kitchen until Mr. and Mrs. Storm bailed off to bed, we decided to move our “party” to the bunkhouse. We were sitting on the beds eating popcorn and drinking pop when we heard something rustling through the leaves behind us in the trees.

We immediately quit chewing and stared at each other. Just as Bren started to speak, we heard something thump on the back of the bunkhouse and then loud thumps on the roof. We ducked down off of the beds and lay quaking with fear on the hardwood floor. We listened to the footsteps going across the roof and then...nothing. We lay still, trying not to panic. “Shhh...I don’t hear anything; let’s run to the house,” I hissed.” The back door is unlocked, isn’t it, Bren?” I could barely see her face, but she nodded her head up and down to let me know we could get into the house.

We crawled on all fours to the door, slowly stood up, turned the door handle, and peeked outside. It was pitch dark and as still as a tomb. That should have warned us that something or someone was outside the bunkhouse; we could not even hear a cricket chirping. We slowly tiptoed out of the doorway and started across the driveway to the back door.

Out of the darkness a male voice screamed as two figures came out from beside the bunkhouse running toward us. Another, deeper voice howled from behind the first one.

Of course, we all screamed like a bunch of scared little girls (which we were) and stumbled over each other trying to outrun whoever or whatever it was and get to the house. Bren hit the door first and about knocked herself out because it was locked! I was right behind her,

and Toni on my heels, by now we were screaming our heads off and banging on the door. The two figures were right on top of us, and we could have raised the dead with our screams. Just as they got almost within reach of us, the back-porch light came on and Mr. and Mrs. Storm threw open the door.

“What the hell...” growled Mr. Storm as Doug and his friend Jim came into the porch light. They quit grunting and hollering at us as they were bent over with laughter. They were laughing so hard they could not even stand up. Jim swore he was going to wet his pants.

I felt like my heart was going to beat out of my chest, and Toni admitted later that she wet her pants...just a little. We all screamed at the two boys, vowing we would get even.

Trying hard not to laugh, Mr. Storm told the boys to get into the house. Mrs. Storm added that they had better not hear another peep out of the two that night as she ushered us into the house.

Gathered around the table in the kitchen, seeing our frightened faces, Mrs. Storm asked us softly if we were alright and if we wanted to stay in the house. We looked at each other; none of us wanted to admit how terrified we were. Hesitantly, we asked if the boys were going to be in the house too, and Bren’s mom said they were, but if they made one move toward Bren’s room, she would brain them.

“My heart’s still pounding; let’s just pile into Bren’s room and stay in the bunkhouse next weekend, okay?” I suggested. I had not been that scared in all of my life. Even with all of the strange goings on we had experienced, nothing had ever chased us or come close to us. Mrs. Storm ushered us down the hall, and Mr. Storm called out a good night to us as we passed his and Mrs. Storm’s bedroom. As the door shut after Bren’s mom, we heard them burst into laughter.

Toni was the last one in the room, and we just looked at each other in awe as we heard Bren's parents laughing...laughing! As we slowly turned down the big bed and climbed in, Bren said very quietly that what the boys did was really a good joke, but paybacks were heck, and the boys had better watch out! We sat on the bed, and the more we talked about it, the funnier it became. We made fun of each other and how terribly frightened we were; the more we discussed it, the louder we got. Soon, we were howling with laughter, pointing at each other, and laughing hysterically.

The bedroom door swung open suddenly, and we about jumped out of bed. A bedraggled Mrs. Storm scolded us and told us to settle down and get to sleep because it was way after midnight! With a last warning, Mrs. Storm shut the door. That did the trick, with just a few more snickers and a promise to get even with the boys, we drifted off to sleep.

Things settled down and there were no more "visitations" or cattle mutilations. No one ever really said what had caused the mutilations although there were rumors of a religious cult or even aliens. Needless to say, that was one summer neither my friends nor I will ever forget!

Saying Goodbye to My Old Friend

The old mare stands sway backed in the field.

In her prime she was the best.

At twenty-eight must her life she yield?

When she was three, I spotted her in a field.

And a feeling of love spread through my breast.

Our relationship right then was sealed.

For she looked up at me from afield,

And from then on, I was blessed

With a companion whose love was revealed.

Her distrust of men she would wield,

And give them quite a test.

But love for me she never concealed.

It seems her fate is sealed.

Arthritis makes walking a test.

Her pain can no longer be healed.

The time has come, it cannot be appealed,

My heart is a rock in my breast.

Her pain and suffering must yield,
I pray in heaven she will be blessed.

Hate to Pity

When we were children, Mom called us Irish Twins
because we were eighteen months apart,
had blond hair, fair skin, and blue eyes.
I hated you.

We could play together for hours, but you always wanted your way,
and you always got it. I'd be watching "Tom and Jerry," and you wanted to
change the channel. If I refused, you would puff out your cheeks like a blowfish,
roll your eyes and purse your lips together to form the "m" in mom,
and I immediately gave in.
I hated you.

You were definitely Mom's favorite--the middle child.
Afraid you would be damaged by your not-so-lucky birth order,
she made you special, the golden boy.
You were older than me;
You should have protected me.
I hated you.

Our teenage years were learning years,
what to do and not to do.
You were bad. You smoked, drank too much, and enjoyed
the "hood status" you earned in school.
The turned-up collar, teen crush haircut, and a cigarette hanging

from the corner of your mouth. I learned what not to be from you.

I adhered to the rules, became an athlete, volunteered, and avoided trouble. I hated you.

We were poor;

you didn't care or know; to you, Mom

was Daddy Warbucks in a dress.

You bugged Mom until she gave in. I got a job.

I hated you.

"I have no money," she would say.

"Write a check," was your answer.

A veil of defeat crept across her face, she gave in.

You never saw it! You got your way!

I hated you.

Strutting into the night, you didn't stick around

to see her pour herself another drink to soften the pain

of a son who could charm the pants off of a spinster

and never feel the anguish he caused. Like every other man

in her life, you let her down.

I hated you.

You'd come home drunk,

Mom worried sick.

Midnight had crept by hours before,

and she knew you were freewheeling down the street

on the Honda 50 she had strapped her already starving budget to buy you
because you wanted to be cool. I hated you.

When she should have punished you,
she cried and hugged you to her. Anguish turned
to relief, love oozing out of her tears.

All was forgiven; the smug smile on your
face peering over her shoulder at me
sent fiery spears through my soul.

I hated you.

The day I hated you the most
was when you horned in on my true love--
my first horse. My lifelong dream had come true!
My own horse stood in his stall, his amazing blue
eyes sparkled with interest. His golden
palomino and white coat bewitched me. Love engulfed me,
and I felt as if I would die from happiness.

I hated you.

I was the one that loved horses--not you.

I begged for one--even prayed for one--not you; you had a motorcycle.

Mom left me in the stall and told me to
wait to ride until she came back. I sat on the
hay manger and drank in the sweet smell of
my amazing new friend. When she came back, you

were with her; you showed up to ride before I could.

I hated you.

If I had been able that day,

I would have shot you dead and never blinked.

At twelve years old, I had never felt such a blinding,
burning desire to kill a living creature.

I detested you with a passion

stronger than anything I had ever

felt in my young life.

I hated you.

“You have to share this horse,” said Mom.

You stood there with your smug smile

knowing how it was ripping my heart out.

I felt sick to my stomach. Share? Share what I

had breathed, eaten, and begged God for

as long as I could remember?

I hated you.

Begrudgingly, I gave in to you again.

I shared my horse the few times you came to ride,

while silently begging my horse to throw you off, so you
would not come back.

I hated you.

You lost interest quickly; it wasn't any fun
since I gave in; there's no enjoyment when
your prey plays dead.

You didn't love horses; I did.

Your passion was always getting your way.

I hated you.

You left home. Mom was so proud; you were the first
to go to college. However, you abandoned your mother
for beer and weed, not school.

You left me to deal with an alcoholic mother.

The long, sad nights of watching her drink away her sorrows, wondering
and worrying about you. Once again deserted by someone
she loved with all of her heart. Dad abandoned her, remember?

I hated you.

You were her chosen child who she missed terribly,
but I didn't.

Times were bad.

She began to drink more heavily.

"Why doesn't your brother call?" her slurred words asked.

"I guess he's studying hard," I'd offer, knowing differently.

Beer and weed, not books and classes.

Thinking only of yourself.

I hated you.

In her old age, alone and broken,
she came to me, her youngest.
She had lost husband number five; this one had died,
not deserted her as the other four had. She was way too
heavy, drank and smoked too much. I was afraid of
emphysema. You laughed and said, "glad it's you and not me."
I hated you.

You all said that, all four siblings.
I had to deal with her drinking
and declining health. But we fooled you, she and I.
She quit drinking, ate healthier, lost weight, made
new friends, we exercised together, lunched together,
and she became HAPPY. She loved her grandchildren.
We became best friends.
I hated you a little less.

The first year was difficult. Homesick for her Colorado
mountains, she would threaten to move. Frustrated, I finally
told her, "Go, Mom, but you call the realtor, moving company,
and take care of everything yourself; I'm finished!" That's all
she needed to hear--me standing up for myself, something I'd
never done with her before. The next five years
morphed into a beautiful relationship. She became my friend,
my confidant, my loving mother--

MINE-- you couldn't take that away.

I hated you a little less.

She died tranquilly,

happier than I'd ever seen her.

She died knowing peace in her sleep.

She called for me before she slept; not any of the rest of you.

I lost my hate.

We buried her, cried for her,

mourned, and laughed for her.

Thankfully, all of you showed up to

tell her goodbye; she didn't die a

lonely old woman as spitefully

predicted by Dad following a post

divorce argument. You realizing Mom was

dying was painful. For once I saw

the love you felt for her. "She looks

so frail," you said with tears in your

eyes as you watched her shaking hand

trying to guide the fork to her mouth.

I felt sorry for you.

Now I have wonderful

memories of our last few

years together.

You don't.

You can't horn in on them.

You can't talk Mom out of them.

You're not special anymore.

I feel sorry for you.

Now you have become the drunk.

Unwanted by your family, you came to me,

moved in without invitation. As always, I

gave in to you. I couldn't let you become

a statistic, another homeless old man.

At first, it was fun; you were

amiable, offering me company in an empty house.

Slowly I realized you had not changed at all; you let

your veil slip, the hidden bottle of rum

in the desk drawer. Your ex called with concern,

I asked her why you came to Kansas. "Free rent," is

what you told her when she asked you the same question.

You worked out in the shop, making a place for your

long leisurely days. My son asked you what you were doing here,

you replied, "Livin' off da fat of da lan.' "

Giving up the facade you came with,
life was not going to go your way.
You left without saying a word. No goodbye, no note,
taking nothing but a few clothes and your dog. Once again
thinking only of yourself.

Now you have nothing and are dependent
on a family that feels sorry for you. Broke and no place
to go, your ex saved you and gave you a home.
I don't hate you anymore.
I pity you.

Visitations

You left me after nearly 41 years
when we swore to stay
Til death do us part.
Yet you didn't leave.
You refused to leave
even though Death did us part.

The low whistle in the silent night.
You made your presence known--
the low whistle in the silent night--again.
The "hey" in the darkened deserted shop.

The night I felt the weight of your body next to mine in our half-filled bed.
Your body clasped close to my back, forming a curve.
It was REAL...
Startled awake, I leaped from the bed,
switched on the light, looking for...who? You?
Still reeling from your body touching mine.
Did you hear me when I shouted in fear and anger, "don't ever do that again"!
You heard; you've never been back in our bed.

Months later, you came to me in a dream.
I wasn't frightened; I knew it was you.

While I slept, you were there.

I saw you floating above the ground with a small child in hand.

Dreaming, I wasn't frightened. I knew it was you.

You descended as I approached.

You smiled at me; I couldn't see the child's face for the hood.

When I came within reach,

You put out your arms, and I felt your warm hug.

I leaned into your strong, firm body.

You placed your arms around me in a warm hug,

I *felt* you but was not afraid.

I leaned into your familiar, warm body.

Because I could SEE you. You were!

I could feel your strong heartbeat.

We embraced slowly, comfortably,

and then you stepped back.

You released me and took the child's hand.

I longed to see his or her face,

But the hood covered the child's features.

Your touch lingered like a fragrance.

Releasing me, child in hand you slowly faded

like mist dissolves in the sunlight.

Your touch still lingered on my body.

I longed for more.

I watched the two of you vanish,

Yet, I felt no pain, no ache, just wonder.

Why did you come to me?

Why did you come to our bed?

Did you come out of curiosity or loneliness?

Did I appear vulnerable?

Were you missing my warm body next to yours?

Did I awaken your sensibilities?

For nearly 41 years we shared our bed.

Do you sleep in heaven?

The only time I've dreamt of you, you weren't alone.

Who was the child with you?

Is the child the child who died in my womb?

Our first born...unborn?

Is the child the child we never named?

How long was it before you two met?

Is he or she why you don't come to me anymore?

Now that you have someone to love...a piece of me,

Do you think I'm strong enough without you?

Have you told the child about his family?

The school secretaries say you visit them.

They miss you giving them grief when you'd arrive
on nights we had to stay late. We never were good apart,
the others jealous because you brought me a treat
to say you missed me, even if it was just for the evening.

The two crosses you gave them make their way off of the brick ledge they sit on.

"Ralph was here today," they tell me, "bein' his ornery self."
But I don't feel pangs of jealousy because you come to them.
I feel in my heart you are with our son or daughter, waiting for me.

I miss you, but not as much as before.

I know that you are happy with the child...our child...
and others who went before you.

You have to know that you will always be my one true love
'til Death--who parted us--rejoins us.

I could never love another even though
you left me after nearly 41 years.

Healing Time

The first saddle shed
burned down
baking 33 years of treasures.
Replaced by an ugly tank
made of metal with
cement floor and iron door.
No fear of fire now.

Three saddles were saved
from the fire housed safely in the saddle
compartment of the horse trailer
far from the ruination.

The owner of the saddles was called
“Perce” -- not his given name--who
calls a cowboy Percival other than
the French mother of the babe?

Tall, lean, tanned--the
embodiment of a Western hero.
Soft spoken and wise yet quick
tempered on occasion. His horses
and ropes were his life.

Family grown and gone, he
quit roping when aging
joints and eyes deceived him.

At sixty-two his abused body gave out--
too much liquor, too many youthful fights--
old Perce passed.

For seven years his treasures
decorated the floor and walls of the
shed nestled beside the quiet country Kansas home.
Dust, cobwebs, and mouse droppings
covered what was his.

The mice, spiders, flies, and
occasional snake enjoyed what
the family didn't take.

The spider worked hard
preparing her yard
for the unsuspecting fly,
while the mouse sniffed and
snuffed for a secret, cozy home:
the abandoned horse blankets
made a great nursery.

One spring day the door flew

open, bright sunshine blinded
the menagerie inside; they darted
and hid.

In came the brooms,
wash pails, and vacuums.
Dust exploded and clouded the air, dirt
on the floor became muddy water,
noisy shop vacs roared into action.
The intruders' nests, holes, and homes were
swept out, washed down,
and sucked up by the
busy humans; the saddles and
bridles oiled and restored.

Enough time had passed
to allow broken hearts to heal.
The old man's leavings
become valuable possessions
once again, he smiled down from above.

This manuscript does not concentrate solely on Aristotelian traits and catharsis; it is, however, an evocation of a lifetime of memories based on, first, the love of horses by four little girls and their friendships, and then on the memories and maturation of myself. Although this is by no means a total history of my life and experiences, this was a time in my life when I was attempting to reconcile what was happening to me without any help whatsoever from the adults in my life. Children just *grew up* back then. Whatever life dealt them, they either figured it out and learned from it, or they escaped into themselves with drugs or alcohol. I was fortunate; I talked to myself a lot and came out of it mostly unscathed. I see now that my brother did not; after all, he's the alcoholic who would be a street person if it were not for his ex-wife and children. Perhaps that is my catharsis; my brother is the victim here...not me.

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9 July 2020

Date

Horse-Crazy Girls: Adventures and Maturing in the American West: An original Creative Nonfiction Collection and Poetry Manuscript and Analysis of Aristotelian Tragic Flaws

in Selected works of Creative Nonfiction and Confessional Poetry

Title of Thesis

