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THE END OF A WILD YEAR IN A NEW WORLD

The United States is now entering the end of its ninth month with COVID-19 spreading inside its borders, which means, if you're anything like me, your 2020 has probably looked nothing like you imagined when you penned those optimistic New Year's resolutions last year.



ANDREW HOCK PHOTO

Many of us have spent the last several months staying home or horse showing close to home, while others went a little further afield and attended year-end championships or went on a fall camping or road trip.

No matter which direction you chose, there's little that's feeling normal as this year slowly winds down. We wear masks at horse shows now; we forgo dinners with friends to sit in our individual hotel rooms and eat take-out food. Instead of hugs or high fives after a great round, we smile and say, from a very careful 6' away, "Great job!" We're not permitted to travel to many destinations on the globe. (Though you'll see two international travel stories in this Untacked—one on the Gaucho Derby [p. 26] and another on the Scottish Highlands [p. 62]—both of those trips were completed before the pandemic took hold, however in the case of the Gaucho Derby it was *right* before.)

Those are very small issues in the face of what some have lost or dealt with this year. And finding any upside when more than 225,000 Americans have died, millions more have been ill, and so many have lost their jobs or businesses—well, it doesn't feel quite right.

But when our lives are disrupted to this extent, it does give us an opportunity to re-imagine our habits or accept the new ones forced upon us. Numerous Olympic riders have said in stories that they appreciate a chance to focus on training and conditioning their horses instead of competing every weekend. Will those riders put fewer competitions on their calendars going forward? For those of us who aren't Olympians, what's so bad about taking a one-month break from competition for some more lessons when we dealt with a three- or six-month pause?

On the other side of the spectrum, what did we take for granted that we never will again? I already feel I'll be much less likely to skip a dinner with friends in the future, thinking, "Eh, I'll just meet up with them next time," when that next time feels like an unknown instead of a given. For those of us who weren't permitted to see our horses for several weeks, it's unlikely we'll even take going to the barn and grooming off caked-on mud for granted. I'm never complaining about the tedious parts of air travel again—long waits, bad food, cold planes, that all sounds fine if those are my biggest concerns!

There's no doubt that 2020 changed us, as individuals, as a horse world, and as a society. In the face of all that's bad, I'm appreciative of new mindsets, and I'm looking forward to taking mine into a hopefully more normal world next year.

Lisa Slade

—Lisa Slade



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TIDBITS

FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY



IN THIS ISSUE

“It’s absolutely artwork, and I get my artistic fix out of that on a regular basis. It really keeps your mind working, and I think that the fact that I’m an artist allows me a lot more success in being able to see this balance and see this finished product. One of the things that was told to me is that you look at this hoof capsule, and you take away everything that doesn’t belong so that you can create that balanced hoof underneath. Mind you, you can’t always do that in one go, but that’s what I’m looking for—I can see that beautiful picture that I want to create, and then I just work towards creating that within the laws of what you can and cannot do with a hoof capsule.”

—Rebecca “Beck” Ratte

Read the full article on p. 38.

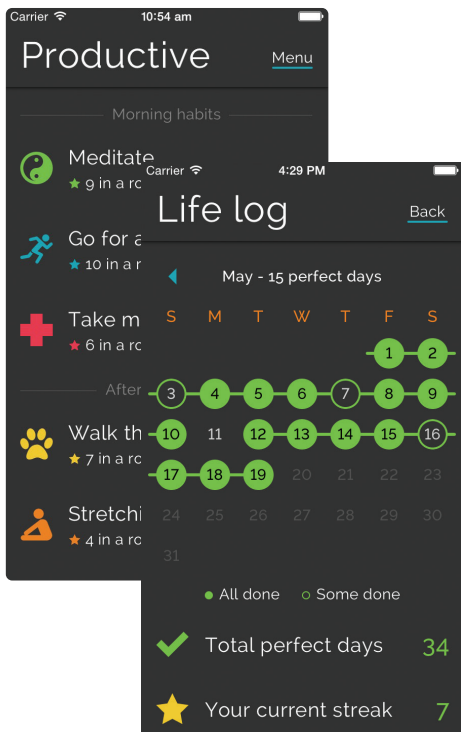


KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO



INSTAGRAM Feature

Rebecca Hart is the recent winner of the 2020 Adequan USEF Para-Dressage National Championship with her partner El Corona Texel, but when the Paralympian and 2018 FEI World Equestrian Games (North Carolina) medalist isn’t in the saddle, she’s keeping her Instagram account (*@RebeccaHart136*) well stocked with training photos and videos, behind-the-scenes images of her horses, and excellent dog and cat content as well.



KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR WITH THESE IMPORTANT DATES

While COVID-19 is keeping people away from attending in-person conventions and seminars this season, organizers have adapted with online options. Follow along with streaming meetings and educational sessions, many of which are free to attend. Visit each organization's website for an agenda and additional details.

NOV.
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Questions With: SHOW JUMPING STAR MAVIS SPENCER

By **Tori Repole**

Photo By **Captured Moment Photography**



"I think that loyalty and hard work get noticed, and they're the things that get you far in this sport. Through that, you end up creating opportunities for yourself," says show jumper Mavis Spencer, pictured on Con Calle.

“**T**he harder you work, the luckier you get,” is a favorite motto for Mavis Spencer, 29, who’s spent the past 11 years building her career in show jumping.

When Spencer decided in 2009 to make a profession out of her childhood passion, her parents, actress Alfre Woodard and screenwriter Roderick Spencer, said she would need to pave her own way in the industry. So after aging out of the junior division, Mavis landed a working student position with Kent Farrington, where she worked her way up to groom and rider over three years.

When she left Farrington’s stable in 2012, Mavis spent the next two years with Ireland’s Darragh Kenny before undergoing a four-year tenure with Neil Jones. In March 2020, she got the opportunity to carve out a program of her own at Whitethorne LLC in Somis, California.

“I get a lot of phone calls from people who want a riding job, or they only want to ride,” she says. “At the end of the day, there are so few of those that I think you have to be willing to work your way into that position rather than just trying to find your ideal job. I think that loyalty and hard work get noticed, and they’re the things that get you far in this sport. Through that, you end up creating opportunities for yourself.”

After a two-year hiatus from competition, Mavis won the first grand prix after her return on Georgy Maskrey-Segesman’s Con Calle, an 11-year-old Holsteiner (Contendro—Velonia, Cassini II), in July’s \$25,000 Jet Pets Grand Prix, held during the Nilforushan Equisport Events’ Temecula Valley National Summer Series in California.

1. Where is your dream vacation?

I have been obsessed with the van life movement, which is something [rider Bethany Unwin] and I have talked about. At one point, we were looking at Sprinter vans to go away and spend a week in Yosemite [California]. I’d love to be able to drive up the coast, to somewhere like Seattle, and go park in a national park, explore and go hiking. I’m a very active, outdoor person, so I think that would be an amazing experience. Going to Yosemite or something like that and camping out is very high up on my bucket list.

2. Talk about what it was like growing up in the Hollywood limelight.

Honestly, I didn’t really, compared to a lot of my friends whose parents were also actors. My mom is super down-to-earth and really wanted us to not feel like the paparazzi were chasing us around all the time. At the end of the day, the way we grew up, it was just her job. If she were a lawyer or a plumber, it would’ve been her job, so we never really treated it like it was overly special.

Not that she isn’t *amazing*, that being said, but it was just kind of, “Mom’s going to go to work. Mom’s going to New York to do a play on Broadway for six months,” and we’d fly out to visit her every month. We got to travel a lot, which was amazing, but it definitely wasn’t something I felt took away from other aspects of life.

3. What do you love most about developing a horse?

I love to show—the competitive part of me does—but I really enjoy working with one, watching them get better, especially the young horses. I just enjoy the whole process behind working with them. In the ring you get to showcase all the work you put in, but I really do enjoy the time at home and doing a lot of different exercises and flatwork.

4. What’s your guilty pleasure?

I would say my guilty pleasure is sleep. I feel like sleeping in means you’re losing hours and wasting part of your day, but every few weeks I’ll sleep 16-odd hours and spend the rest of the day on the couch. Every once in a while, I feel like I need a mental reset day like that—a mental and physical reset day.

5. What item can’t you live without?

I’m sure a lot of people would say this, but I’d be lost without my phone. I try to not look at it while I’m riding, so I set certain tones for people I know I need to respond to. But beyond that, I make notes of everything I need to do; I use my calendar for appointments, and I’m constantly in contact with clients who are looking for horses. 📞

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MOUNTAINS & UNKNOWN TERRITORY

**THE INAUGURAL RUNNING OF THE GAUCHO DERBY DOESN'T
GO THE WAY ANYONE PLANNED BUT STILL OFFERS PLENTY
OF ADVENTURE.**

By Linda Vegher



It was March 2019 when, delusional from exhaustion, I looked out of my Boston brownstone window into the dismal alley, trying to locate the source of the alarm that had been beeping since 2 a.m.

It finally dawned on me that I'd made a rather drastic decision. I had moved across the country from California to attempt working a corporate job. And not only had I uprooted my entire life, I also had to figure out how to balance this new city life *and* train for the Mongol Derby, the world's longest and toughest horse race. This was a city where I knew maybe a handful of people at best and no horse people.

In a mild panic, I cold-called nearly the entire Northeast chapter in the American Endurance Ride Conference and found a few past Mongol Derby competitors and other amused riders who would help me as best they could with catch-rides and advice. And sure enough, I filled the calendar with endurance rides and somehow managed to prepare and complete the Mongol Derby while working a full-time job in an entirely new life. On top of that, I came out completely unscathed, and what a riot it was.

Finishing this incredible race, high as a kite, and entering back into normal life was, well, to be honest, unbearable. After a show, event, marathon, expedition, race—you know, the melancholy that sets in once the thing you've been preparing for all year has ended? Well that had set in. What now? The bustle of society was overwhelming; my day-to-day routine was a grind, and the public restrooms were repulsive; I missed the Mongolian hole in the ground. But mostly I missed the wide-open spaces and like-minded people of Mongolia.

As I rode up one of the five escalators and two elevators to my office job, I was trying to keep it together.

A New Type Of Derby

My mentor from the Mongol Derby had already sent in her application for the Gaucho Derby, a new race set for March 2020 and managed by the same company as the Mongol Derby, The Adventurists. This was designed as a 10-day, 500-kilometer adventure race, broken into 40-kilometer legs and without changing horses every stop. The Andes Mountains would make the race a test of skill, not flat-out speed like the Mongol Derby.

She was two interviews deep in the process. I knew I had to at least apply. I mean, it was the maiden voyage for this race. We would be pioneers, complete guinea pigs.

If I was being honest, fear and anxiety had been festering in my psyche—not the fear of the race or of the Patagonia wilderness, but the anxiety of the day-to-day, the fear of failure, the fear to make the right decisions, the fear of rejection, the fear of

commitment, the ever-looming personal fears and anxieties. Am I living up to my potential? What do I want out of life? Am I happy? Am I meant to be alone? Am I making this world a better place?

And on top of it all: How am I ever going to do everything and go everywhere I want to go in this short life? These thoughts ran—and continue to run—through my head about four times a day and have for as long as I can remember now; the answers vary by the day. Strongest of all is the looming fear of running out of time, the time to do it *all*.

This is why I signed up for the Gaucho Derby, which offered a fear I *could* confront; the basic elements of nature are really not that intimidating. The simplicity of being in the wilderness compared to the mundane daily life—it felt like a breath of fresh air. If I could do this, I could do anything, right?

And just like that I got in, and much to my disappointment, my friend did not. My heart sank as I felt I took her spot, and I thought, “Oh, surely someone will drop out for one reason or another, and she'll get in.” No such luck.

By November 2019, I was up against a double challenge, being in a city with the same full-time job and being in the Northeast winter, which helped me in the long run as my blood was thickened from the cold. The days were short, dark and frigid. Originally I thought I'd do backcountry ski courses to prepare, but there was no room in those classes, as I had signed up for this race just less than four months before the start. I landed on taking navigation courses, the vision of Jeremiah Johnson filling my thoughts—it'd be the ultimate solitude in the cold, just me and my steeds, where navigation and equipment are key.

But unlike the Mongol Derby, where there were tips and advice on equipment and saddles we would be using, the details of the Gaucho race were vague. I called famous packers and backcountry guides to gather knowledge and understanding of all the possibilities that could occur—slipping of packs, crossing deep rivers, what to do with your two horses at night (hobbled versus tied). I was an information sponge, learning from everyone, from extremists in the Canadian backcountry to a long-distance trail runner at REI.

“It felt like a breath of fresh air. If I could do this I could do anything, right?”



Gaucho Juan Valeriano Lauquen, from Paso del Sapo in the Chubut Province, works at La Perseverancia.

At one point it was suggested that the food with the lightest pack weight and most calories and highest fat count was “camper’s chili,” which consisted of a bag of chips deflated with a pinprick, a packet of mayonnaise and a single cube of cheddar cheese. It came on the journey—packed brilliantly.

Sheep Fat And Unhelpful Maps

Before I knew it, I was off to El Calafate, Patagonia, an important tourist destination in the area since it’s the hub to visit different parts of the Los Glaciares National Park, including Perito Moreno Glacier, Cerro Chaltén (also known as Mount Fitz Roy) and Cerro Torre.

Then we took a bus seven hours north to La Perseverancia, where we arrived in the dark to find our beds in a working sheep shed. The musk from the hides and carcasses in the rafters filled the cots as 24 riders scurried to get their head torches and look for a spot.

The next morning the equipment rigging began, as all the saddles, girths, hobbles and bridles were new, leading to conditioning them with sheep intestines to soften the stiff rawhide. D-rings were screwed into saddle trees; holes were punched in stirrup leathers; hides were cut for the seats of the saddle, in traditional gaucho form.



The start camp sleep quarters at La Perseverancia were in a traditional gaucho sheep shed, which consisted of slatted floors and hundreds of hides hanging in the rafters and pens, lamb being the main course for most of the stay.



Gaucha hospitality shines through at all ages, including with 10-year-old Wenceslao Méndez, from Haras San Andrés del Moro in Lobería, Buenos Aires. The Méndez family brought their Arabian endurance horses for the third-to-last leg of the race.

There was a swirl of discussion and debate about what would work best. And then the saddlebags—10 kilograms—were packed for the riding horses, while the pack horses were loaded with hay. To say the packing was precarious is an understatement, and the problem solving was tedious. My city fingers were sore and raw from all these leather adjustments and the greasy sheep fat.

And then there were the unhelpful maps, which looked as though the printer ran out of black ink and gave you an interpretive topographic watercolor. Clearly traditional navigation was not in the cards, so the Garmin GPS it was. Nothing like using a 2" by 2" screen to help navigate uncharted terrain and wilderness.

We also had a tracker, so headquarters could see us wander the wilderness if they needed to find us, and the trackers also served as emergency text message vehicles—no satellite phones were allowed, no cell service existed, and there were no humans in sight.

Last but not least, after having some significant concerns about the physical map quality, a ranger from Los Glaciares National Park spoke to us about all the characteristics of this

mountain range we were about to tackle. We learned interesting facts: The Andes do not ever have lightning storms. There is extreme wind. Pumas won't bother you. But most importantly, when you see clouds that look like lenses—lenticular clouds—beware: There is extreme weather coming, and it can drop 50 degrees in the blink of an eye, he said very seriously.

No Way Out But Through

The last night at camp, each rider drew horse lottery numbers for the next morning, each steed sporting a numbered tag on its halter. Packing up my bag the night before, knowing I'd have to shove my sleeping bag in after I woke, I wondered what was ahead. I had a feeling this was *not* going to go the way I had planned, but I was nonetheless anxious to start this journey.

As I walked down to the 50-plus horses on the line, I found one lovely little black-and-white criollo as No. 52. But where was No. 53? Oh, the only loose horse in the pen—the one that took three people to catch despite all others being tied. He would steer himself in and out of all the horses, escaping every chance he could.



RICHARD DUNWOODY PHOTO

Tom Morgan is the colorful character and creator of the Mongol and Gaucho Derbies. “We’re always looking for new adventures, and I just sort of fell in love with how the Mongol Derby turned out,” he says. “There are fewer and fewer places left where horses play a central role in a culture and where a race on these scales would really work.”



JULIA YOUNGBLOOD PHOTO

The author, Linda Vegher, rode out of the valley, on the mandatory backtrack after surviving the night of the storm.

I decided this one would be the pack horse first—no need to get bucked off from the start. As fast as a tortoise walking up a mountain, we all rigged our equipment the best we could and started the race to the sound of a bugle. There was equipment slipping left and right, people having to stop and reconsider, reposition and adjust; it was utter chaos. You were lucky to get down the road! Not to mention an occasional rhea—a Patagonian emu bird—flock would run down the road, or one would get hung up in the barbed wire fence to be left for dead.

But finally we were off, through Vet Check 1 and up to the valley. The voice of Tom Morgan, creator of the Mongol and Gaucho derbies, was ringing in my ears: “Go through the first valley!” By then I had paired up with a motley crew: Chris Maude, or “Maudie,” an eight-time Grand National jockey; Annie Aul, an event rider from Georgia; and ex-Royal Marine Rob Skinner. They were going at a good pace and seemed like a good balance of serious and realistic, and they let me ride with them.

By sunset we had looked for this valley and thought we could just stay above it to give us a more direct line to the next checkpoint. But what looked like trees through the monocular were in fact the thickest wooded bushes atop treacherous cliffs and on hollow ground. Even a machete could not help us. This put us on the side of a mountain for the first night’s camp.

Knowing that we would have to backtrack through steep ravines was a hard pill to swallow on Day 1. Then I gently reminded myself, we were on a pioneer journey; we were the chosen group of riders here to help develop the race for years to come.

Day 2 we were all up and running. The horses were all there, and we set off to backtrack to ... where? We were not quite sure, but we had no way through. We ended up getting off the pack horses and herding them like cattle up several steep hills with loose footing. Finally we saw the mouth of the river and had some hope of a path down to the valley.

And in an instant Rob’s horse sank into a bog so fast that Rob’s face hit the horse’s poll. Blood was smattered on Rob’s nose and lip. Thankfully he was OK, but his lip was split right up to his nose.

The bogs were like nothing any of us had ever seen: One minute the footing was fine; the next the horses were up to their hocks. The ground could look dry with flat pieces of shale on top, but no, it was bog! It was impossible to pick your way through.

We traveled down through the narrow river with walls on both sides, and we came to the valley with several miles to go. We went through the river valley, around huge pieces of stone, to yet another valley; it was another valley of wet bogs, with no way

ANYA CAMPBELL PHOTO

Riders made their way across the Rio Lista Valley on their way to Vet Check 2.





The final climb to the ultimate view of Mount Fitz Roy consisted of cow trails, bogs, treacherous river crossings and notably steep terrain for riders Julie Youngblood, Erik Cooper, Louise Crosby and Sophie de Selliers.

around but through. But finally, we saw the gaucho hut! There was fresh water for our bags, and veterinarians and medics.

Rob had to stay with the medics, but we were good to go. There was warning of a storm coming, even though it had been 75 degrees that day, and the clouds looked like spaceships. But ambitious to make up lost time, we headed out. By the time we got over the first pass the sideways rain had started, and it was getting colder and colder.

Finally we decided to set up camp and save the weather for the morning, or at least until we could see what we were dealing with. As we started to set up camp by the river, we saw a large group from the derby on the other side, and they carried on. We'll catch them tomorrow, we thought, better to be safe than sorry.

No Longer A Race

On Day 3 we awoke to freezing temperatures and sleet. It's one thing to be cold but trying to pack a tent in the freezing sleet—

talk about sore and incapable fingertips! It took what seemed like an hour to tack up, shaking and taking long, deep breaths. The other group didn't come back, so we assumed they must have been going the right way.

We started the same way, but it was snowing, with the ground starting to freeze. We stopped to assess if it made sense to continue. Annie and Maudie looked quite serious and cold; it was a concerning situation. We decided to go back to the last vet station with the gaucho hut, only to find the vet and medic had never left, and four more riders were there!

The situation was bleak; the storm wasn't letting up until the next day, and we were all in this small hut with a mud floor, some wet wood and a smokey fire. We played games and shared what we had of our dehydrated foods and snacks.

We were lucky to have made it, as most of us would have developed hypothermia had we stayed out on the trail. In fact we learned the next day that four people in the other group—the ones we'd seen on the other side of the river—were in fact



ANYA CAMPBELL PHOTO

Erik Cooper is an avid horseman originally from Missouri who's no stranger to troubleshooting in the wild. An event manager for the Gaucho Derby, he also runs his own travel company, Erik Cooper Adventures, and spends the majority of the year leading horseback trips to Mongolia's remote lands.

helicoptered out for hypothermia. Communication was scarce, but none of us were allowed to continue forward on this route. We wondered if everyone else was OK. We were brought to camp via car that night, and we met up with the rest of the group. It was time to reorganize.

At this point I stopped treating this as a race; it was just a ride. We rode a lovely batch of Arabians one day with no pack horses. The next day we did a part of our originally planned ride but not the “Valley Of Death” that was in the original route. We went through sections of the Tucu Tucu Valley on horseback, and then we took a truck to Lago San Martin Valley and to Rio Portones (Chalten).

Each experience was its own, but none compared to the last ride from Rio Portones to Canigo, with a final view of Mount Fitz Roy. The morning of the final ride we had to catch our own steed in the field; that was more exhausting than the ride! The horses weren't having any part of it. Finally, graced by powers that be, we all had horses and were ready to start the grand finale ride to the final view of Fitz Roy, and then on to the finish line, which was a river crossing with the mountain peaks in the background.

We were told we could do this trek in one day if we went the perfect route, so we were all eager to make that happen. But this terrain was the steepest of all. We climbed and climbed on narrow, goat-width trails with loose rock, on cow trails, guanaco (a type of llama) trails. We tried to get through but with no luck. At one point we were fully in guanaco country, listening to the eerie animals' brays echoing down the mountain.

We didn't make it in one day, but we managed to camp in a round paddock that night, knowing the next day was the end. Alas, we walked up the steepest terrain ever on foot for the last two miles to the magnificent view. And here it was: Mount Fitz Roy.

Somehow the horses knew it was all downhill from here, and they were right on so many levels. They briskly picked up their pace as we made our way to the river, swimming for the last 30 yards. Frozen from the wind and the river, I found myself in a hotel room in a hot shower for about 25 minutes, thawing and grateful to be back in one piece.

A New Adventure

But down in the lobby it was apparent the world was different than we'd left it. COVID-19 was spreading rapidly. All the British riders were scrambling to figure out how to make it home as quickly as possible. Parents and visitors were eagerly booking new travel too. There were rumors of borders closing and a complete shutdown.

It was a somber finish party. Many were headed out the next morning. Still slowly acclimating to reality, I decided to stay calm and carry on with my original plans and ticket, as it all showed as on time. COVID-19 seemed still a minimal danger—surely this was just all a little extreme.

In El Calafate, all seemed normal. We were back in the hotel we'd started in, in the cute little tourist town. A group of us went into an internet cafe for a couple hours, only to come out and find the area a ghost town.

As I got back to the hotel, the front door was locked, and they were asking for my passport. Somehow I got to the front desk where I knew the concierge. He said I had been in the country for more than 14 days, so I was fine, but foreigners who had been there less than 14 days would be put into mandatory quarantine. Supposedly a French tourist in the town had come down with COVID-19 that day, and the town shut down.

From here, another adventure began. Flights said they were scheduled, but they were not; you couldn't get through to the airlines to rebook, and if you did, nothing was guaranteed, as different countries were closing their borders by the hour, making it impossible to navigate an exit.

On the last flight out, after being 22nd on the waitlist, I flew from El Chaltén to Buenos Aires. From Buenos Aires there were no flights to the United States anymore, and the only option was flying home through Brazil.

There was quite the contrast in Brazil—not the slightest nod to a pandemic; it appeared all was normal. My flights were on time, and I made my way to the U.S. where I waltzed into Boston, another ghost town, no questions asked about where I had been.

I slept one night in my apartment in Boston, and I high-tailed it to the country, where I have been since. My survival skills were tapped out. Quarantining in my friend's tack room for two weeks was luxurious after camping in Patagonia. Work from home took some getting used to, but mostly because it was a technical adjustment. The sales results came at work, and the first week in April's biggest sellers? Bidets and trampolines—for the toilet paper shortage, and the other as entertainment for all the home-schooled kids. This is life during COVID-19. While not quite comparable to riding the cliffs in the Andes, it's a wild ride into a weird new world. 🍷

To learn more about the Gaucho Derby, visit
TheAdventurists.com.



ANYA CAMPBELL PHOTO

Riders Erik Cooper and Ivo Marloh looked into the Rio Belgrano Valley, contemplating the task ahead.



BECK RATTE PHOTO

Beck Ratte Isn't Deterred

From trick riding in *Cavalia* to shoeing upper-level sport horses, Ratte is always looking for her next adventure and a chance to prove she can do anything she wants.

By Kimberly Loushin

Rebecca “Beck” Ratte remembers feeling highly dissatisfied with her life’s direction; an adventurer at heart, she’d started to feel trapped. Then she and her friends scored tickets to see the equestrian production *Cavalia* in San Diego.

As Ratte watched the opening act, she found herself thinking, “I could do this.”

“I thought, ‘I understand this kind of training.’ I just got really jazzed on it,” she says. “I had done gymnastics as a kid and always loved dance and had always kind of pictured myself in my head as a performer, as an actor. I wanted to pursue those artistic talents, and I had never gone for it, and this just seemed like a dream come true.”

That evening the group went to a bar with one of the acrobats from the show, and after a few shots and some encouraging words, Ratte found herself submitting a video. A week later, the company called her in for an audition.

“I walked in, and they handed me this little Andalusian cross gelding and said, ‘This is the horse that you would be using if you were to get the job,’ ” she recalls. “ ‘He’s quirky and a little difficult. You have 15 minutes. Show us what you’ve got.’ ”

Ratte had spent a few years working for Allen Clarke at Horsemanship Unlimited, and that experience served her well in the interview.

“I got really, really lucky that all the work I’d been doing in the past few years really came into play—the give and the release,” she says. “He really responded to that kind of riding, and he was fabulous for me. I wasn’t an amazing dressage rider at the time, but I knew the basics, and we were piaffing and passaging around and doing tempis, and the horse was phenomenal.”

Two weeks later she was performing a pas de deux in front of an audience.

“I was shaking the entire time,” she says. “You couldn’t see the whole audience, thank goodness, but you could see the first 10 rows, and you’re supposed to smile and be very serene, and I just was like having a panic attack. It was really bad, and of course everyone came to see me. It was maybe not great, but we did it.”

Two months later, she’d sold most of her belongings and moved to Australia with *Cavalia*.




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Beck Ratte used the horsemanship skills she learned working with Allen Clarke to help land a position in Cavalia.



PHOTO COURTESY BECK RATTE

NO CHALLENGE TOO GREAT

Australia afforded Ratte the adventure she'd been seeking, and she explored many other countries on the worldwide tour too.

"The show in general, while yes it was this dream come true, it also proved to be very emotionally taxing," she says. "It was physically taxing as well. It was a lot of long hours, and the mentality of a lot of the riders was very difficult to get on with—the constant drilling of the horses. There were times that I thought that I would leave, and it was not for me. Then you would step back, and you'd go, 'If I don't ride this horse then who's going to take care of him?' And you kind of always stayed. And of course the perks were great."

Another American at Cavalia, Fairland Ferguson, took Ratte under her wing and introduced her to trick riding. But the Cavalia directors didn't like Ratte using the show's horses to learn those skills.

A chestnut stock horse named Gus opened the door for her to begin again. Unruly and unsuited for the show, the directors allowed Ratte to teach Gus dressage in order to sell him.

"The premise of the background and training I did was if you could teach a horse to learn, you can teach it anything," she says. "So teaching it with the release of pressure, realistically you can teach it anything, as long as you can teach them to give to pressure."

Unwilling to give up, Ratte asked her fellow cast members what skills a trick horse needed. As she taught Gus dressage, they also learned trick riding together.

"It just happened that [the directors] saw what I was doing and sort of let me keep going," she recalls. "Then the head director showed up and was like, 'OK, put him on stage. If you can show us the tricks then you can keep going. Otherwise he needs to be sold.' And by grace, we got out there and were able to do a few really good passes. He had completely turned the corner and wasn't going around like a crazy thing anymore, and we'd really bonded, and they let me keep trying."

According to fellow performer Spencer Rose, that was a perfect example of Ratte's dogged determination.

"There's just no such thing as a challenge for her," Rose says. "It's crazy. So first she learns to trick ride with



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basically everyone saying no, and I'll tell you, I was one of those people who were like, 'I don't think this is a great idea.' She really earned my respect when she could trick ride, but she also became an acrobat in her late 20s, which is even more unheard of, and now she's a farrier. She kind of makes her plan, and there's nothing that's going to stand in her way."

AVOIDING BEING STAGNANT

Trick riding was only the beginning of Ratte's experimentation into the many facets of Cavalia, and eventually with its spin-off *Odysseo*, which she performed in for a year. She mastered new roles in *Odysseo*, first taking over a trampoline act for an injured colleague, then later performing in aerials.

"I'm super addicted to learning new things and pushing my skill sets, and you can see this as a pro; you can see this as a con," she says. "I oftentimes take up things that people think I shouldn't, not necessarily to prove them wrong, but because it's like, 'Well, why not?' I want to see if I can do it. I never started doing aerials with the intention of doing it in the show. That wasn't the intent, but I also am addicted to being really good at whatever it is I'm doing."

Ratte was in awe of the aerialists: Not only were they expressing their femininity in the movements, but it required immense strength.

"I think moving your body and then learning how to move it in a graceful, controlled way is good for your life in general and is good for your confidence just walking down the street," she says. "It's this thing innately as humans we want to do. We want to be graceful and beautiful in the things that we do."

Those skills translated into her riding, even if not in the most obvious ways.

"I think moving your body and then learning how to move it in a graceful, controlled way is good for your life in general and is good for your confidence just walking down the street," says Beck Ratte of her desire to learn how to perform aerials.



KEVIN LAMB PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

"We want the movement between us and our horse to be graceful, and so I see the same connection between doing aerials and having that grace between me and the apparatus and having the grace between me and a horse over a fence or in a dressage movement. It's the same thing," she says. "I struggled honestly, and I think this is probably why I chose these things. Because the fluidity and the release of tension that you need in aerials is the same fluidity and release of tension that you need in riding.

"It was this challenge that I knew I could take into other aspects of my life," she adds.

But after four years, Ratte felt like she was hitting a wall with Cavalia. Coupled with a growing desire to put down some roots and a Thoroughbred named Raz, who showed potential as an event horse, she decided to tender her resignation.

"I literally did every act," she says. "It was exactly how I wanted to do the show, but it's kind of like, I've done everything. What else can I do? And there wasn't really

Work And Play

Rebecca "Beck" Ratte isn't often idle.

"If you ask my friends, I do all of the things," she says. "I'm a pretty active individual. This weekend I went on a six-mile trail run, and then the next day I went on a two-hour motorcycle ride. I just recently got into motorcycles because of COVID-19, and the fact that I can't go anywhere or do anything. Because I stopped eventing, of course I still need the adrenaline or something to push myself, so I took up free diving, which is where you dive on one breath to see how deep you can go."

Ratte also enjoys exercising her artistic skills, whether it's painting, sculpture or coming up with a new craft project.

"I own rentals in Ocala, Florida, so it's my investment at this point, and so I've done the decorating and the interior design for it," she says. "I refurbished the furniture for it, and the new one I'm creating all the artwork for the walls. It gives me something to do at night and keeps that active, and it's a nice outlet for me. I like doing silly things like creating wind chimes and things that aren't necessarily needed but are pretty and make the house look nice. They make me happy."

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anywhere else for me to go, and I don't like being stagnant. It felt like I'd sort of reached that point, so I saw my opportunity to get back into the 'real' horse world. I found a really great little mutt in California, and I adopted her. And it was like, well, I guess this is it; I guess I'm leaving. I wanted to spend time with friends and create my own life."

AN ACCIDENTAL VOCATION

Ratte's horse addiction started with My Little Pony and blossomed from there. Her parents introduced her to gymnastics, but she was more interested in petting the elderly horse behind the barbed wire fence nearby.

Coming from a military family, Ratte moved every year, which made it difficult to build a rapport with people in order to gain rides, but she made it work, trading labor for saddle time. Her competition opportunities were few and far between, but the thrill of galloping through fields led her to eventing. She wanted to take a working student position

“It was this challenge that I knew I could take into other aspects of my life.”

—BECK RATTE

with Phyllis Dawson after high school graduation, but when her parents said they'd cut her off financially, she decided to attend Virginia Intermont College. There she majored in art and earned an associate's degree in equine science.

Throughout college she bought and sold a few horses of her own and took on a few projects from others. After graduation she accepted a working student position at Mike

Beck Ratte started teaching herself trick riding for fun and eventually got good enough to perform in Cavalia.



and Emma Winter's Wayfarer Eventing in Newnan, Georgia, where she could finally immerse herself in the competitive side.

"That was when I was finally able to try to start [going] somewhere," she says. "I finally got a pretty OK Thoroughbred, and by OK I mean it didn't stop every time I jumped it. It was the best one that I had. Sometimes you have to make the best one out of what you get. Life just is what it is. I've never really had the money to do it, but I always loved the training aspect of it and focused on that."

She left the Winters when she met and married a military man shortly before he deployed, though they later separated. Ratte knew she needed to make a major change.

After a phone call with eventer Jennie Brannigan, Ratte moved to California for a position as Tamie Smith's assistant. Ratte and Brannigan's friendship blossomed out of a mutual dislike of one another while working for the Winters, and Ratte describes Brannigan as a catalyst for change in her life.

"It's always been like, 'Hey, what do you think about this?'"

And she's either been supportive, or she's been like, 'Oh yeah, I'll make a phone call for you,' " Ratte says. "It's this really cosmic thing where she's had this huge influence on where my life has gone. It is odd because I literally won't talk to her for a year at a time, and then when I will it'll be this big, huge deal. She's been a great friend and support that way."

Smith connected Ratte with the Clarke family, which led to a full-time position at their Horsemanship Unlimited. In addition to sport horse training, the Clarkes introduced Ratte to what ultimately became her vocation: shoeing horses.

"The family had the HITS Thermal [California] shoeing account, and I'd ride jumpers all morning, and then I'd shoe all afternoon," Ratte says. "It was actually a really great way to learn the trade and the industry. They were meticulous, very talented farriers. I eventually found I was shoeing as much as I was riding, and I was running around with [my] head chopped off. You don't even take your helmet off from one barn to the next trying to ride horses and work at



Beck Ratte was in *Cavalia* and its sister production *Odysseo* for four years, performing in nearly every act from equestrian to aerials.

VANESSA KAY PHOTO

different barns, and then I'd shoe, and I didn't have to run around or scrape for \$15 rides. I could make a flat rate and realized this was consistent, and I could do it, and I like it."

FORGING HER PATH

Ratte was trying to decide between riding and shoeing when the opportunity with Cavalia arose in 2012. When she left the production after four years, she went to work with Australian show jumper Scott Keach in Ocala, Florida. Then three years ago, she began working with Steve Teichman, the Land Rover U.S. Eventing Team farrier, basing in West Grove, Pennsylvania, and making trips south during the winter months.

"I've been shoeing for 48 years, and I've had probably 100

apprentices. This girl is a machine," says Teichman. "She is the most organized, detailed, helpful, hardworking person I've ever had. There's no question about it."

Ratte gradually left her rider persona behind as she found she couldn't reach her own high standards with eventing as her hobby. Though Ratte's largely hung up her riding boots, she still pulls them out on occasion, especially if Brannigan asks for her assistance. In addition to introducing young horses like Amazing Anthem to their first cross-country fences on the ground, Ratte schools Brannigan's upper-level horses Twilightslastgleam and Stella Artois.

"I trust her with any of my top horses," says Brannigan. "She's got a super feel on the flat and knows how to move them in their body. She's cool because she can work with a really difficult horse, but at the same time I trust her to sit on the nicest horses as well."

Ratte admits it's odd to consider herself a "former event rider," but she recognizes it was the right move.

"This job has evolved so much that to do it the way I needed to do and focus on it, kind of the last thing that I want to do at the end of the day is go try to perfect my halt transitions," she says. "I enjoy horses so much that that's not what I need from them anymore."

Ratte's personal client list includes upper-level eventers Brannigan, Buck Davidson, Lillian Heard, and Sara Kozumplik Murphy and Brian Murphy, but her roster also includes dressage horses and jumpers, as well as the occasional steeplechaser for Leslie Young. For her, the most satisfying part is finding ways to make lame horses more comfortable.

"I had a guy tell me that his vet bill's been down since I started them a year ago," she says. "[He said,] 'I don't do nearly as many injections since you've been shoeing these horses,' and that's really rewarding. You do make a difference; your job is important, and to think that what we do to these horses does matter and affects the entire body—sometimes that's really overwhelming and scary, and other times I feel so grateful to have such an impact. It's very rewarding."

Teichman says Ratte has a unique ability in the profession.

"You do make a difference; your job is important, and to think that what we do to these horses does matter and affects the entire body—sometimes that's really overwhelming and scary, and other times I feel so grateful to have such an impact," Beck Ratte says of her career as a farrier.



JAKE PETERS PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

“Things that we have worked with, and things that she has picked up, she has boiled down into a really great playbook. She’s smart that way and has a good strategy. I think that’s very important,” he says. “She’s not a tinkerer but someone who goes right at it and goes for the throat and knows how to solve problems. [She has] really good problem-solving skills.”

Ratte looks at a hoof in much the same way she would look at a hunk of clay waiting to become a sculpture.

“It’s absolutely artwork, and I get my artistic fix out of that on a regular basis,” she says. “It really keeps your mind working, and I think that the fact that I’m an artist allows me a lot more success in being able to see this balance and see this finished product. One of the things that was told to me is that you look at this hoof capsule, and you take away everything that doesn’t belong so that you can create that balanced hoof underneath. Mind you, you can’t always do that in one go, but that’s what I’m looking for—I can see that beautiful picture that I want to create, and then I just work towards creating that within the laws of what you can and cannot do with a hoof capsule. I think it absolutely lends to

“She’s not a tinkerer but someone who goes right at it and goes for the throat and knows how to solve problems.”

—STEVE TEICHMAN

my success in this career.”

With a packed schedule of her own, Ratte only works for Teichman once a week, but the partnership has opened plenty of doors. She assisted at the eventing training camp

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Beck Ratte competed up to preliminary in eventing, including on Raz Cal, but she eventually gave it up in order to focus on her career as a farrier.

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prior to the 2019 Pan American Games (Peru) and worked at the Land Rover Kentucky CCI5*-L the past two years. Her “big claim to fame” in 2019 was tacking a shoe back on Oliver Townend’s winning mount Cooley Master Class.

“It was extremely intimidating to not be there with Steve, and that was like, this is an international opportunity, and I’ve got the team vet [Susan Johns] recommending me,” she says. “It was one of those, ‘All right time to put your big girl pants on and step up.’ Maybe it’s just a simple thing, just put the shoe back on, but I didn’t mess it up.”

NOT SMILING AND NODDING

Historically farriery was regarded as a man’s profession, and while more women are joining its ranks, Ratte experiences sexism and callous comments regularly.

“I’ve definitely run across plenty of men in barns, clients, owners, even other farriers or other professionals who, even if they think they’re joking, will make comments: ‘Well, girls can’t be farriers.’ ‘You’re *too pretty* to be a farrier.’ ‘Where’s the real farrier?’ ” she says. “I think generally speaking they’re not individuals that mean harm, but we are so calloused to the thought that comments like that are acceptable, that they just don’t think twice before saying it. And as women we have been conditioned to believe that

those comments are acceptable, or that they are just trying to be funny, or that we should smile and nod even if inside we’re seething.”

Ratte has found that addressing it head on is the only way to change that mindset.

“Having an open discussion about it is really the only way to move forward and stop those sorts of interactions from happening,” she says. “I think in general a lot of men

don’t mean any disrespect, but unfortunately they haven’t been educated in a world where there’s any difference.”

Ratte hopes to be the first female farrier to travel with the U.S. eventing team to the Olympics, but regardless of how far she goes in her career, she aims to encourage other women to consider the profession.

“The other stereotype if you are a woman in the industry is that you’re very tomboy or a very masculine woman, and I think that owning my femininity as a strength is something I want to continue to focus on throughout my life,” she says. “I think that women are so often taught that femininity is something to be tamped down, that we should be stronger; we should be tougher. We’re not accepting that the gentleness and the kindness and the caring are strengths.

“Also as someone who comes from the rider’s perspective—coming to this industry I bring a lot more to shoeing than just the mechanics of making a shoe and putting it on,” she says. “I think for too long it’s been a job where men want to bang around some steel, or say they can hang around the horse girls in the barn, or they heard you can make money at it, and I think the more women and the more farriers with riding backgrounds we can get involved in the industry, the better the care for the horses, and the future of shoeing in general really could advance.”

A Community that Cares *For The Horse*



Established in 1994 to unite everyone who is dedicated to improving the well-being of horses and stewarded by equine veterinarians, **The Foundation for the Horse provides support for horses in need, relevant research and continued education for future equine veterinarians.**

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Your One-Stop Shop For Horsey *Holiday Gift Ideas*

With suggestions for everyone on your list—from children to dogs to horses—you're sure to find something that'll fit under the tree.

By Lisa Slade



Rönner Carrousel Mimosa Slippers And Horse Heaven Robe

Ready for some cozy evenings at home? Slip off your riding boots and into a pair of Rönner's Mimosa Slippers, which feature an adorable carousel horse detail and are handcrafted by local artisans in Colombia. The slippers are made of 100 percent cotton velvet with leather soles; \$329. (Since each pair is custom made, allow two to four weeks for delivery.) Pair with the Horse Heaven Robe, which features a beautiful print in a kimono-shaped silhouette. The fabric is made from recycled plastic bottles. The robe is available in black (*shown*), powder rose and mint tea; \$199. RonnerDesign.com.

For
Adults



One K CCS With MIPS

Helmets are first and foremost designed for safety, but if they can also be fashionable? Well, that's the icing on the cake. One K's newest offering boasts MIPS technology in its CCS—Custom Color System—model. The helmet, in addition to its excellent safety features, allows the user to purchase different colored vent rails, top panels and front shields for a completely customized look. The helmet comes with black matte parts, and colors can be purchased separately. Available in a full range of helmet sizes, including long oval models; \$299.95.

OneKHelmets.com.



FITS Finley Full-Seat Breeches

We've long left behind the world of boring, beige-only breeches, but companies like FITS are still finding ways to innovate. The Finley pants feature gorgeous embroidery on the hip and back pockets, and popular Euro-seat styling. The silky four-way stretch fabric will keep you comfortable during long days in the saddle, and the silicone full-seat tread pattern offers security. Available in ink (shown), sahara and anthracite; \$169. FITSriding.com.



Redingote Rain Gear

It's a truth universally acknowledged that the sun will shine all day while you're at work, but as soon as it's the weekend or evening, the skies will open up with rain—and that's even more likely if it's a horse show weekend. But you might not mind a downpour quite as much when you're zipped into Redingote Rain Gear, which is a waterproof and breathable one-piece suit designed to protect you from all the elements. It features fully taped seams, an oversized roll-away hood to fit over a riding helmet, zippers on the legs to allow for easy pull on over boots, an interior cinch cord in the waist for an adjustable fit, back and armpit ventilation, and a handy D-ring on the hip that holds your essentials. Available in regular and short inseams in pure black; \$248. If you're seeking something warmer, Redingote also offers a Winter Insulated Jumpsuit for \$278.

RedingoteEquestrian.com.



Loriece Twisted Horseshoe Nail Necklace

Display your horse hobby around your neck in the most subtle and striking way possible. The pendant is made of 925 sterling silver, which is both nickel free and tarnish resistant, and it comes on an 18" chain, though longer chains are available upon request; \$105.95. Loriece.com.

For
Adults

Carhartt Men's Washed Duck Insulated Active Jacket

Present a present you *know* will last: a Carhartt coat. The Insulated Active Jacket offers the durable exterior you know and love from Carhartt—a heavyweight, 12-ounce ring-spun washed cotton duck fabric—with a breathable 80-gram 3M Thinsulate interior that'll allow for riding, teaching lessons or unloading hay. The attached hood has an inner drawstring, and all seams are triple-stitched, so you can be sure this jacket will endure long after the holiday wrapping paper is in the trash. Available in moss (pictured), dark brown, Carhartt brown and black. Priced from \$109.99-\$119.99, depending on size.

Carhartt.com.

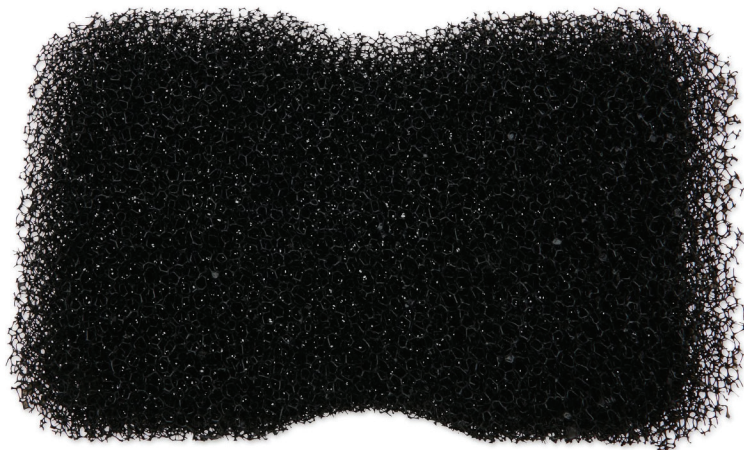


Life Between The Ears Gifts

Didn't get the chance to travel this year? Chances are your friends didn't either. But you can still transport them across the globe with a set of Life Between The Ears cards, featuring beautiful equestrian scenes, including these Happy Holidays cards that show off a snowy Gjøvik, Norway. Pair with a coffee mug for the perfect present for a barn buddy or trainer. Card sets of 10 available for \$25; mugs are \$20. LifeBetweenTheEars.com.

Epona Tiger Tongue Groomer

When bathing isn't possible, the Tiger Tongue can step into its place. The grooming stone, designed to work like a cat's tongue, can erase saddle marks and caked-on mud with equal ease. Buy a second one to scrub water buckets! \$7.95. Find at [SmartPakEquine.com](https://www.smartpakequine.com) or many other tack stores.



PS Of Sweden Matching Sets

Sick of digging out a ratty saddle pad and overused pair of boots to put on your horse before a lesson or clinic, only to realize your faded lime green pad in no way works with your horse's bright red boots? PS Of Sweden offers a solution with a collection of matching saddle pads, ear bonnets and polo wraps or brushing and bell boots. Prefer a little more variety in your attire? You can also mix and match the colors! Visit [PSofSweden.com](https://www.psofsweden.com) for the full range of discipline, color and size options; the pad, bonnet and polo set pictured retails for \$243.75.



Horseware Amigo Stable Plus Disc-Front Closure

Give your horse the gift of warmth this winter season. Horseware Ireland's new Amigo Stable Plus Rug, available in a fetching fig/navy/tan color, can be used alone or as a liner for any of the matching Horseware turnout rugs. Featuring 200 grams of fill with a 600-denier polyester outer, the rug's disc-front closure system is designed to sit flush against the horse's chest, alleviating all pressure points. Comes with detachable hood; \$169.95. Shop.horseware.com.



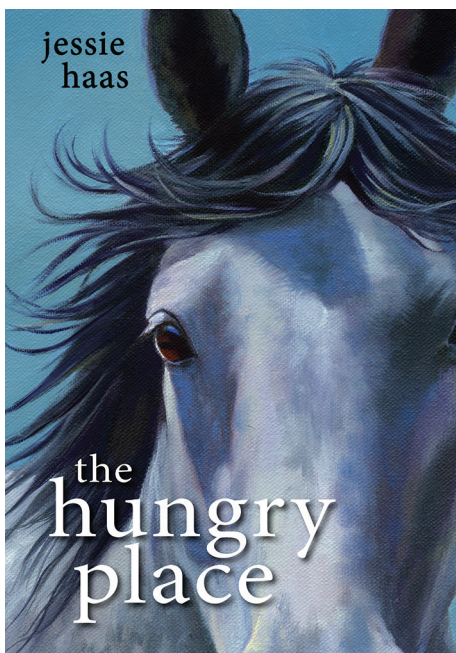
NIGHTWATCH Smart Halter

Whether your horse landed firmly on the “nice” list this year or ended up more in the “naughty” category, he still deserves a few new items—especially if one of them also benefits you. With this halter, you’ll have access to your horse’s vital signs at all times through an app, and you can quickly detect if anything’s gone awry. The halter measures your horse’s heart rate, respiration and activity level, and then it produces a number between 1 and 10 on its Equine Distress Index. You can also use the geolocation system to find your horse in his field. Halters come in cob, standard and oversize. The Smart Halter Essential, which works on Wi-Fi only, retails for \$997; the Smart Halter Plus, which can access a cellular network, is \$1,147. Add multiple horses with the Smart Halter Premium system for \$1,397.

SmartHalter.com.

“The Hungry Place”

Give a child in your life some literary joy with award-winning author Jessie Haas’ new novel “The Hungry Place,” which tells the tale of Connemara pony Princess, an elderly owner named Roland and a tenacious 13-year-old girl named Rae. For ages 8-12; \$17.99. Learn more at Boydsmillsandkane.com or purchase anywhere you get your books.



Equiline Junior Tech Turtleneck

This top will keep the young competitor in your life warm and comfortable through months of winter and spring riding. It's made of a quick-drying and stretchy material. Available in blue; \$120. EquilineAmerica.com.



Joules NeatFeet Character Socks

Socks make the perfect stocking stuffer, and any horse-crazy kid will love to see these. They're made of a breathable bamboo mix and available in numerous sizes; \$7.95. JoulesUSA.com.

For
Kids

Horseware Long-Sleeved Tops & Knitted Cord Breeches

Two adorable shirts, two excellent messages: "My Pony Is My Best Friend" and "Dare To Be Different." Both long-sleeved tops—made of a cotton, polyester, spandex blend—are available in sizes from 3/4 years through 11/12 years; \$36.95. Pair with the Knitted Cord Pull-Up Breeches, made in a stretchy and soft corduroy with knee patches and cute back-pocket details. Available in wine, in sizes 20-30; \$69.95. HorsewareIreland.com.



C4 Collar

You probably already have at least three C4 belts for yourself, but the company also offers a line of sturdy dog collars, made from a medical-grade thermo-polymer, in many fun patterns. The collars are all anti-odor, antimicrobial and waterproof, plus they come with a lifetime guarantee and personalization options. And because you can always use another C4 belt, pick up one in a print that'll match your dog. There are dozens to choose from, but we're partial to the "I Know I'm Extra" Avocado and Vintage Horses; \$39.95-\$44.95 depending on size. [ExploreC4.com](https://www.exploreC4.com).



Orvis ToughChew Memory Foam Bolster Dog Bed

Your dog deserves the best, right? Of course. But your wallet also deserves something good, and though an Orvis bed is an investment, this might very well be the only dog bed you ever have to buy. The ToughChew cover—with multi-layer technology that includes a ripstop nylon base layer bonded to a comfy micro-velvet top layer and is finished with an 840-denier nylon liner—comes with a lifetime warranty. Plus your buddy gets an orthopedic memory foam cushion to rest his tired body on, and a comfy three-sided bolster for his head. The bed is available in charcoal chev, loden and charcoal, in sizes small (\$349), medium (\$389) and large (\$429). For those with less destructive pets, the bed also comes in a regular cover version for \$229-\$349, depending on size. [Orvis.com](https://www.orvis.com).



For Dogs

Non-Stop Dogwear Pro Raincoat

Scandinavians know a thing or two about braving severe weather, and Norwegian brand Non-Stop Dogwear is fully prepared to outfit your pup for this season's inclement conditions. Your best friend will appreciate the high collar and breathability of the waterproof Pro Raincoat whether he's out in a deluge or a sprinkle. Reflective dots on the side panels help keep him safe during after-dark walks or late-night barn runs. The coat has a place to attach a leash via collar or harness, a secure belly cinch, and leg straps to keep it in place. Available in black; \$69.90-\$74.90 depending on size.

Nonstopdogwear.com/en-int/.



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LOST AND FOUND IN THE HIGHLANDS

An “Outlander”-themed ride through Scotland’s wild, romantic north shows off the country’s past.

Story And Photos By **Kelly Sanchez**

As we climbed an old military road through a landscape splashed in green and gold, the only sounds were rhythmic hoofbeats and the wind sweeping over the heather. A small loch came into view, a sliver of pewter in the autumnal light.

There are places that enchant with their beauty and others that get under your skin. For me, Scotland does both. I’d spent a week there years ago and was instantly smitten, as much by the accents and the music as by Edinburgh’s sandstone buildings. How could I resist a place whose national animal is the unicorn?

I decided on my next visit I’d see the Highlands. But long-distance travel took a backseat to work and raising my sons. When I caught a few episodes of the time-traveling drama “Outlander,” which recounts the story of Claire Randall, a World War II English army nurse who finds herself transported to 1743 Scotland, my Highland dream was rekindled.

For the uninitiated, “Outlander” began as a series of historical novels by Diana Gabaldon that trace Claire’s experiences as she is thrust into the middle of the Jacobite risings and a love affair with the hunky Highlander Jamie Fraser. It’s since become a popular cable TV show—much of it filmed on location in Scotland.

Ignoring the fact that my time in the saddle alternates between dressage lessons in an arena and no riding at all, I found travel company Highlands Unbridled, which runs

rides throughout Scotland. The late-September “Outlander”-themed ride in the Great Glen suited my schedule and love of fall. Staying in inns along the way, we’d delve into Scotland’s tumultuous history, visiting locations from the books and learning about the events that inspired them.

Three days before I was due to board my flight, I sprained my knee—a feat I somehow executed while standing in my dining room. But postponing would only tempt fate, so I wedged rolls of kinesiology tape into my suitcase and hoped for the best.

As I waited in London for a connecting flight to Edinburgh, my apprehension gave way to excitement. If I couldn’t ride, there are certainly worse places to console myself than Scotland’s moody north.

After a few days roaming Edinburgh’s cobbled streets and marveling that I’d pulled off a solo trip abroad, my knee felt pretty good. (That dram of whisky in the Balmoral Hotel’s bar didn’t hurt.) And then I was on a train to Inverness, unofficial capital of the Highlands, where our ride would begin. (Though “Outlander’s” Inverness scenes are filmed in the town of Falkland, the real Inverness is a worthwhile destination all its own.)

I settled into my B&B, and as the lights in town began to sparkle, I crossed the River Ness and headed to a local favorite, MacGregor’s Bar. I found a table and ordered crispy, beer-battered haddock and a pint of Scottish ale and listened to two fiddlers and someone on the bar’s upright piano.



Dominique Mills leads the way along a Scottish trail that parallels a small burn, or stream. The ride passes through the Great Glen, which stretches some 80 miles from Fort William in the southwest to Inverness in the northeast.



A small lochan shimmers in the autumnal light.

The Scots are a friendly lot, and I began chatting with a couple named Karen and Gordon. Hearing that I was from California, Gordon seemed mystified that I'd travel to Scotland. When I mentioned horseback riding around Loch Ness, he exclaimed, "The monster's surely dead by now!"

A LAND OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

The next morning was sunny and cool when I met our hosts, Jan and Graham O'Neill, and our guide, Dominique Mills, who looks every bit the Scottish lass although she hails from Australia. My riding companions for the week were two experienced horsewomen: Laurie from Canada and Silvana from Switzerland.

Our horses—all mares—had spent the night in a pasture on the shores of Loch Ness, and they jostled at the gate when we arrived. I would ride Corrie, an 11-year-old buckskin Highland Pony-Connemara cross; Laurie was paired with Magic, a few-spot Appaloosa; and Silvana would ride Annie, a 20-something-year old Irish Cob cross. Dominique would lead the way with Bonnie, a Quarter Horse-Arab cross.

Most of Highlands Unbridled's horses are native pony crosses. When I asked Jan about her preference for mares, she said, "I think they have a better work ethic. In the wild, the mares would lead the herd."

Corrie took exactly zero interest in me, wanting only the contents of her breakfast bucket, an alfalfa chaff and conditioning mix that Graham whips up for each horse, designed to supply slow-release energy throughout the long days on the trail.



Scotland has more 30,000 freshwater lochs and smaller lochans.

Though the damp pasture provided the perfect backdrop for the tiny winged menaces known as midges, only a few naggd at us as we began grooming. We put boots on the barefoot horses—all but Magic—and tacked up with endurance bridles and Italian endurance saddles fitted with sheepskin covers.

We mounted and adjusted our saddle bags, which held water bottles, extra hoof boots and lunches for us and the ponies. Graham and Jan would meet us at the end of the day, our luggage in tow.

Before heading onto the barely two-lane road that ran alongside the loch, Dominique gave a primer in street and trail etiquette and demonstrated her hand signals. Pumping her arm up and down meant trot. Moving her fist in a small circle meant canter. A raised hand meant slow or stop.

And then we were off. Corrie's quick, sewing-machine trot would take some getting used to, but my mind was elsewhere. Cars on the opposite side of the road! Cars passing closely!

After 10 minutes or so, we turned off onto a trail. Dominique looked back and asked, "Shall we try a canter?" And suddenly we were flying up a winding path, a blur of bracken ferns and slender pines on either side, and then a stretch of blue.

Invigorated by their uphill sprint, the horses snorted and



coughed as we slowed to a walk. I looked to my right, and there was Loch Ness, looking very un-Loch Nessian. There were boaters out, and I thought I spied someone on water skis. Hardly the murky depths from which a mysterious creature might emerge. I later asked a shopkeeper about reports claiming Nessie might actually be a giant eel. With a twinkle, she replied, “Ye cannae know.”

We continued our climb up the Pass of the Fair-Haired Lad (Cadh a’ Ghille Bhain in Gaelic) and looked down at Urquhart Castle, a picturesque ruin on the northwestern shore of Loch Ness. The trail wound through the pines, and I heard children laughing, but Dominique explained it was only the branches rubbing together—a reminder that we were in a land rich in myths and legends.

At midday, we unsaddled the ponies and poured their grain onto the grass. As red kites circled overhead, it was sandwiches, chips and chocolate for us.

The temperature rose, and we rode in T-shirts, zigzagging from forest to farmland bordered by centuries-old dry-stone walls. So much for crisp autumn days!

Our journey would take us along old drovers’ paths and a network of military roads built in the 1700s under Gen. George Wade, who’d been dispatched to the Highlands to ensure the British army could quash another Jacobite rebellion. The Jacobites, who play a key role in “Outlander,” mounted a series

of “risings” in the 17th and 18th centuries aimed at restoring James VII and his heirs to the Scottish throne.

After covering nearly 20 miles, we arrived at a pasture beside the Whitebridge Hotel, a cozy Victorian-era inn where we’d spend two nights. Graham and Jan were a welcome sight, and they helped us clean and feed the ponies (a pump-operated portable horse shower worked wonders). The horses always came first.

Silvana and I were sharing a room, and as I took my turn in the minuscule bathroom, I glanced at my reflection and winced. We might have been doing an “Outlander”-themed ride, but this was not a face that would entice a Highlander. My hair was plastered to my head, and I looked tired and windblown. A long, hot shower was definitely in order. That is, until Silvana informed me the water pressure was little more than a trickle.

I settled for a quick rinse off followed by a beer in the hotel bar before we all gathered for dinner.

On my first night in Edinburgh I’d adopted a “when in Rome” attitude and ordered haggis. Traditionally made of sheep’s heart, liver and lungs minced with onions, oatmeal, suet and spices and boiled in the animal’s stomach, Scotland’s national dish isn’t for everyone. While it wasn’t terrible, it wasn’t a culinary experience I was eager to repeat. Most nights, I stuck to salmon or fish and chips.

Our days were blissfully uncomplicated: up early, breakfast in the hotel (where I happily ate porridge and fresh berries), and a walk or a drive to the horses. And then we rode. Unused to so many hours in the saddle, my muscles protested each morning, but aided by lots of kinesiology tape, the aches subsided once we started riding.

SURE-FOOTED PONIES AND MANY, MANY SHEEP

Over the course of the week, we saw many more sheep than people. The sheep are a legacy of the Highland Clearances that began in 1750, when some 170,000 Highlanders were forced from their homes to make way for sheep farming. Though many farms were later replaced by “sporting” estates dedicated to stalking, shooting and fishing, Scotland still boasts an impressive 6.6 million sheep.

No matter how long we’d been on the trail, the horses were always game for a spirited canter, and Corrie made it her mission to stay ahead of Magic, who had her own ideas on the subject. Occasionally, these canters veered awfully close to gallops, a gear I’ve never intentionally reached in a dressage arena. “Forward” wasn’t going to be a problem when I returned home.

Fortunately, the mares were sure-footed and responsive to Dominique’s signals. And while Dominique was quick to anticipate hazards like uneven footing, traffic and excitable

horses in nearby fields, our ride through Fort Augustus likely shaved a year off my life. A bustling village at Loch Ness’ southwestern end, it’s famous for its system of locks that convey water traffic through the Caledonian Canal.

Riding for me does not generally involve paved surfaces, and there we were on a street surrounded by idling cars, tractor-trailers and tour buses waiting for a boat to move through the locks. Any one of those things would catapult the horses I normally ride into orbit, but though our ponies had their ears pricked, not one spooked.

Finally we were on the move. Tourists took pictures and cars slowed, but I fixed my eyes on Dominique and Bonnie and whispered to Corrie that I had children that I hoped to see again. Not until we turned off into the hills did my heart rate return to normal.

That afternoon, glowering billows in the distance threatened rain, but overhead, the azure sky was studded with puffs of white. I gazed out at the rolling peatland and realized I couldn’t remember what day it was.

Our next hotel was the Loch Ness Lodge Hotel in Drumadrochit, which sits next to an attraction called Nessieland, complete with a replica “monster” in the parking lot. Silvana and I had a room in the hotel’s “modern” wing, which was decked out in a wildly mismatched array of tartans—upholstery, draperies, even carpets—and had a hall that looked like something out of “The Shining.” But the water pressure was excellent, so I wasn’t complaining.

After a passing rain, the horses slosh through puddles on the trail to Tighachrochadair, west of Muir of Ord.



Mist hung low in the valley the next morning as we set out to explore Glen Affric, considered one of Scotland's most beautiful glens. We followed an old road that straddled Mackenzie and Fraser lands and rode through an area where Gabaldon had situated Jamie's family home, Lallybroch.

After trots and speedy canters among birches and native Caledonian pines, we stopped beside Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin ("ben-a-vey-un"), a slender loch that shimmered in blues and mauves, looking as if it were lit from within.

We spent the following morning touring Urquhart Castle, which witnessed bloody conflicts between the English and the Highland clans. Loch Ness looked dark and mysterious under brooding skies, and I couldn't help scanning the water for movement just beneath the surface.

On our last day of riding we covered some 18 miles through hills blanketed in heather, just off its August peak. We'd experienced a bit of everything weather-wise, but by late morning, the temperature dropped, and we rode through showers driven by a strong wind.



Dressed in traditional Cameron of Erracht tartans, pipers and drummers from the Queen's Own Highlanders military regiment perform in Inverness, the unofficial capital of the Highlands.

The horses travel along a road that winds through small sheep farms bordered by centuries-old dry-stone walls. Loch Ness lies in the distance.



Corrie, a Highland Pony-Connemara cross, wears a sprig of heather, which grows wild throughout the Highlands. The Druids considered it a sacred plant.

When the skies cleared, the horses slogged through huge puddles as we watched red deer sprint through the hills. By mid-afternoon, we unsaddled the ponies one last time. Though I was cold and damp and dreaming of a hot bath, I wasn't quite ready to say goodbye. But Corrie was far more interested in rolling in the grass than in sentimental farewells.

We spent our final night at Ord House, an elegant hotel from 1637 that's home to two black Labradors and a ghost with a penchant for wandering the halls at night. We saw no sign of her, but Graham showed his Scottish pride and donned a kilt for dinner as we toasted an unforgettable week.

Our last day was devoted to sightseeing, and Jan showed us locations pivotal both to "Outlander" and Highlands history. First up was the village of Beaulieu, ancestral territory of the Clan Fraser of Lovat, of which fictional Jamie is a member. We explored Beaulieu Priory and ogled the tartans and tweeds at Campbell's, which has occupied the same building on Beaulieu's High Street since 1858. And then it



was on to Clava Cairns. The Bronze Age cemetery complex contains stones arranged in large circles with openings that align with the setting sun in midwinter as well as standing stones. In "Outlander," the stone circle at Craigh na Dun (alas, also fictional) transports Claire to the past, and I couldn't resist resting my hands against the stones as she had. And just then, some nearby cows launched into a boisterous call and response, drowning out any chance of traveling through time.

Our visit to Culloden was a poignant reminder of the last major battle fought on British soil. In 1746, overpowered by British government forces, an estimated 1,500 Jacobites were killed in a clash that lasted under an hour. Their defeat marked the beginning of the end of the clan system. Property was seized, clan tartans and bagpipes were outlawed, and the teaching of Gaelic was restricted.

Culloden and the Highland Clearances prompted many Highlanders to emigrate to North America, Australia and New Zealand. But Scottish identity remains strong, and I'll admit a feeling of kinship to a heritage that I can trace through my mother's family.

After a few more days on my own in Edinburgh, it was time to head home. I thought about what painter Georgia O'Keeffe said of her adopted home in the Southwest: "If you ever go to New Mexico, it will itch you for the rest of your life." I feel the same about Scotland and am already plotting my return. 🍷



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[A C L O S E R L O O K A T]

Leg Up For Cleveland's Kids

LUCK creates an environment where children can connect with horses and learn to give back.

By Martha Drum

An environmentally friendly 1970s architectural concept, an equine-assisted therapy certification site and a local land conservancy aren't the first things that come to mind when picturing urban Cleveland, Ohio. But the team behind nonprofit Leg Up For Cleveland's Kids believes in going beyond first thoughts.

"What we want is people to come out and see our kids ride and have their jaws drop and think, 'I can't even do that!'" says Elizabeth Kahl, a licensed clinical social worker who helped found the program in 2016. "We want to see that community sense of ownership and pride and storytelling."

Currently operating after-school, weekend and summer programs through area barns, program leaders plan to obtain space within the city to build a stable.

With more than 300 participants through its first four years, LUCK is already making an impact. Malukah Adu-Niasse, who joined the LUCK board after bringing her sons' scout troop to ride, described one boy's reaction.

"Sometimes [this child] doesn't get enough credit for what he does right,

just for what he does wrong," she says. "And when he got to the stable and saw how big the horses were, he was overwhelmed. But when he got on and got to riding, he was really good. He was a natural. And his comment to me was, 'Finally, I found something I do right!'"

SEEING A NEED, ENVISIONING A SOLUTION

Like children in many urban neighborhoods, LUCK participants face multiple challenges with limited resources. In Cleveland's school district, 43% of students live below the poverty line. The city's police department has operated under a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice since 2015, following an investigation that identified patterns of excessive force. The 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by a Cleveland police officer heightened awareness of those issues in the community, which is 67% people of color, and raised demand for safe outdoor spaces for young people.

As a Cleveland-area resident with nonprofit experience and a doctorate in urban education, LUCK co-founder Laura Hammel felt moved to respond.

She'd previously worked as the marketing director for a financial institution seeking to counteract redlining and other biased lending practices in the city. At Notre Dame College (Ohio), she teaches a student body that is mostly first-generation college students with many Cleveland public school graduates.

"I just became very passionate about all the societal issues and the disparities in education, in economic opportunity—food deserts, absentee parents through no fault of their own, nothing to do after school, their sports programs have been cut because of lack of school funding, the list goes on," she says.

At the same time, Hammel saw the benefits that riding provided her teenage daughter. "She's ridden since she was 6, so we've had horses," she explains. "I've witnessed the impact of horses on my daughter and what good it did for her, and any time I'm in the barn, I just relax and feel, 'This is so wonderful.'"

A past board member of the historic Cleveland Grand Prix, Hammel began reaching out to friends in the nonprofit and urban development communities.



RAY DUVAL PHOTO

LUCK participants learn about braiding at Topline Stables in Aurora, Ohio. Trainer Adam Gray (left) of Graystone Hunters and Jumpers hauled his lesson horse, Blue, to the facility for the session.

“We brought a group together, and we started brainstorming,” she says. “Women with social work backgrounds, therapeutic riding backgrounds, more riding backgrounds than I have—I have the fundraising and administrative background. It took off quickly.”

They developed a vision for an equestrian program that would provide direct physical and mental health benefits to young people and expand participants’ future opportunities by facilitating social connections.

“Our mission is to provide the ability for our kids to form relationships with people that they might not normally meet,” Hammel says. “There are 8,000 ways to define social capital, but when I was at urban school, and how we defined it for LUCK, is networks of

relationships.”

Kahl wants participants to feel that they have a genuine stake in the program. “That’s the challenge,” she says. “How do we create an environment that feels safe, feels supportive, that feels like something they can take ownership of, as well as have the flexibility with staff and equines in our training to be able to move in whatever directions that they choose to pursue?”

The plan for a stable within the city of Cleveland emerged as their goal.

HAVE ENTHUSIASTIC KIDS, WILL TRAVEL

While searching to identify a prospective property within city limits, LUCK offers its programs in

collaboration with several equestrian centers. “We have a number of very generous trainers who allow us to come into their places for free and use their horses and their staff,” says Hammel.

It’s a significant time commitment, because some of the stables are as far as 40 miles from the children’s homes. To make the long trip worthwhile, LUCK sessions often run most of a day and have even included overnight “campouts” in the barn. LUCK provides transportation, which, like all aspects of its programming, is free.

“They don’t come in for an hour and go home,” says Hammel. “We do a whole day. We have monthly big group programs of 15-20 kids, and then we have bimonthly smaller group programs of up to 10 kids, then we have biweekly individual programs, where we get three or four kids who are actually at the level where they’re taking lessons.”

Beyond simply teaching how to walk, trot and canter, the instructors also embrace LUCK’s mission to teach the children marketable skills and to connect them to the broader equestrian community.

Hammel says, “We have occasional skill-building workshops, so we have farrier workshops, braiding workshops, so that they can actually get some money-making skills under their belts.”

Students have been hired as working students and grooms at shows and had the opportunity to compete in academy classes, often on LUCK board members’ own horses.

“When they found out what it was worth, when they found out what they could get paid to braid a mane, nobody’s ever offered them that kind of money for anything,” says Adu-Niasse, who

works as a financial advisor in addition to volunteering with LUCK and with the Kenneth W. Clement Boys Leadership Academy, a public school her three sons attend. “We have so many horse farms around Cleveland, but if you don’t know that you can get paid to do these kinds of jobs, how would you know to look for a job there? The exposure is good for all the kids.”

LUCK incorporates ATHENA teaching methods developed by the Horse Boy Foundation, which originated to support equine therapies for autistic individuals but now encompasses those with trauma, anxiety, learning disabilities, PTSD and other neuro-psychiatric conditions. ATHENA emphasizes positive training of the horse, particularly through in-hand work.

However, LUCK is not a conventional therapeutic program. “We have wonderful therapeutic riding places in Cleveland, and we don’t compete with them because we deal with able-bodied children,” says Hammel. “But our able-bodied children experience community trauma in a ton of different ways.”

Indigo Cosme, 19, found the LUCK program as a senior in high school. Her only prior equestrian experience was occasionally seeing a police horse. “When I was younger, I had a very bad time relaxing, trying to gain my focus, trying to gain my concentration, and horses really make me think about that,” she says. “You can’t be too intense with them, because they feel that. You have to be understanding and calm, and you have to open your mind a little bit, which I find amazing because it really helps you become a better person.”

Cosme, who works full time during

“You have to be understanding and calm, and you have to open your mind a little bit, which I find amazing because it really helps you become a better person.”

—INDIGO COSME

the week in a makeup factory and on weekends in food preparation, says, “It’s helped me so much with coping, with keeping my feelings in check, with managing my life, basically. When I do get to go to the barn, it’s a relief. It’s my getaway. Once a month, I get to go ride horses, which is my favorite thing in the world. When you work seven days a week, every time you get on that horse, it’s like relaxation just flows over you.”

The ATHENA/Horse Boy Foundation also offers an instructor certification course for LUCK students.

“We’re just trying to keep them out of trouble, because a lot of them are from neighborhoods where there’s a lot of trouble to get into if somebody’s not helping them,” says Adu-Niasse. “Taking that energy and putting it into a horse stable or some kind of programming for teenagers works out a lot better. They’re all brilliant. I want them to know that there’s so much more to life.”

IT’S HARD TO BUILD A BARN IN THE CITY

As LUCK’s leadership team has pursued a permanent home for the organization, they’ve educated city councilors about the benefits the stables could provide—from cost mitigation via repurposing

abandoned buildings to offering wellness sessions for city personnel—and discovered other organizations that were also interested in serving the inner-city community.

The West Creek Conservancy protects natural areas in the greater Cleveland region but also reclaims and re-uses vacant urban land. The Lake Erie Institute offers education in eco-psychology and holistic ecological leadership that is typically unavailable in the city. The First Tee, a charity that introduces underprivileged children to golf as a way to learn life skills, has an active Cleveland chapter. An urban fish farm had taken over a nearby shuttered manufacturing plant.

As these potential partnerships developed, LUCK’s original goal of an equestrian facility expanded. “We aren’t just going to make it a stable,” says Hammel. “It’s going to be a wellness campus for the entire community.”

LUCK’s team planned to exceed municipal requirements for nuisance control, runoff management and other code-related details by producing a green building. They secured an architect to design the stable in the Earthship construction style. Created in the 1970s, the Earthship concept uses local materials—often construction

debris or earth-packed rubber tires—and geothermal principles to build low-impact structures that use solar power, conserve rainwater and reduce energy consumption.

“We’ll be the only Earthship stable in the United States,” says Hammel, noting that the structure could draw visitors from around the country.

When the Cleveland Metropolitan School District announced that an agricultural high school on six acres of land in the village of Newburgh Heights was slated to close, the team’s fortune finally seemed to live up to its name.

“We have all of these wonderful partners ready to move,” says Hammel, who’s submitted a thorough description

of the program, its facilities plan and its importance to the community.

“We’re waiting for the Cleveland public schools to [respond with a written commitment]. The superintendent of schools grew up on a farm and loves the idea, but he’s a little preoccupied with COVID right now.”

The agricultural high school site would mesh well with LUCK’s fellow nonprofits, since the land conservancy could take stewardship of the land; existing greenhouses could continue to produce food for the neighborhood, and the balance of the property would become green space for recreation.

“We’ll be addressing food desert issues, and Cleveland school kids could

still use the campus to do horticulture work,” says Hammel.

Kahl adds, “Right now, we’re doing good work, which is inspiring. But we could do so much better work if we were able to get this site up and developed. We’d be able to reach so many more, because they’d be able to reach us.”

GO BIG AND STAY FLEXIBLE

Plans for the new facility include a 20-stall barn, indoor and outdoor 100’ x 200’ rings, turnout paddocks and office space. They hope to offer access to their facility and future horses to students in Cuyahoga Community College’s (Ohio) veterinary technology program—another connection to prospective careers.

“I think it will be beneficial to the children and their families [to share the campus with other organizations],” Hammel says. “We need to be who we need to be, but our partners can be the bridge to the whole community. We have an opportunity to make the community better. Just by bringing together all of these different groups with the same mission, we can make a big change.”

It’s important to LUCK that its programs generate some income to be less reliant on donations. One potential source of revenue may be maintaining a couple of stalls for paying layup boarders, with LUCK and vet tech students overseeing the horses’ care. Also, the Horse Boy Foundation has indicated its readiness to designate the site as one of its instructor training centers, which would offer financial support for LUCK and the chance for



LUCK participant Delon Hendrix rides Ruby Slippers at the Western Pennsylvania Professional Horsemen’s Association show in Chagrin Valley Falls, Ohio.

RON SCHWANE PHOTO

more program graduates to get certified and work in equine-assisted learning and therapy positions.

What advice would LUCK's leaders give to others thinking of creating an urban horsemanship program?

Hammel underscored the importance of having an advocate in local government. "Know your politics; get a good councilperson as your champion; get some good politicians as your champions," she says. "Be creative thinking about income streams—generating income, as well as grants. LUCK would be happy to share any of our documentation, our business strategy, whatever anybody would like to see."

Well-intentioned outsiders, says Adu-Niasse, should take time to get to know the community and draw on the resources already there.

"There are programs in the inner city, like we have peace camp; we have different art programs," she says. "Reach out to inner-city programming and find the program that has children coming, because whatever they're doing, they have the children's attention. Once you've got their attention, give them exposure to your program. These are great kids; they're just in a bad situation, some of them."

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Whenever LUCK settles into the neighborhood, Kahl believes the program will achieve its goal of community ownership and empowerment.

"It's not necessarily our story to tell, right?" she says. "We might be able

to provide opportunities and provide space but then allow the community to create what they need."


"It'll be a huge difference [to be in Cleveland]," says Adu-Niasse. "All of the kids will be able to catch the bus there, or the parents could actually drive by and see what they're doing and get them involved, because we have yet to have parents come out."

Many LUCK participants, like Cosme, remain involved as young adults and enjoy introducing younger children to the horses.

"I've got some of my friends into the program because I love it so much. That's why I want to share it with them," she says. "I recently got my little brother and sister into the program. You should see her smile when she got on this horse. Her smile was huge. My brother is 16, and he just went for his first lesson, and he loved it also. It's hard to be caught up in the house all day because of this corona, and they're very outgoing kids, so I love that I get to share this experience with them."

Adu-Niasse believes a stable in the city will give children a space to slow down and observe. "If LUCK gets the urban youth to calm down and listen, and be one with the animals, be one with the creation, that's amazing in itself," she says. "It's also meditative. So many times there's so much noise in city youths' ears, that when they get the opportunity to find quiet, they get to grow a little bit.

"The children will see that once you work for it, you can have anything," she says. "Let them see that."

For more information about the program, visit luck4kids.org. 

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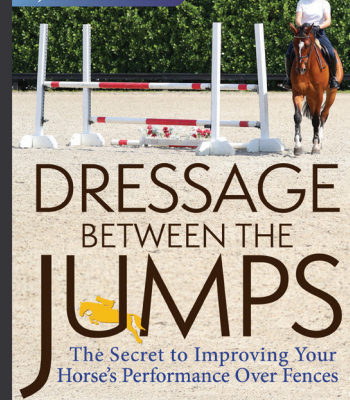
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A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS

It's not just death and taxes: If you live in most areas of the United States, cold weather is a certainty as well. Here are some of the Chronicle staff members' favorite seasonal products to help you through.

To Make Winter Grooming A Breeze

Normally, I find grooming quite satisfying. You start with a scruffy beast, employ a little elbow grease as you examine your mount from nose to tail, and finish with a gleaming animal. You know what's not satisfying? When you bring in your dark bay from the field during the colder months, get to work with the currycomb, and raise clouds of dust that won't brush off. While I know theoretically he's cleaner,



he looks dirtier than when we began, as the fine particles are now sitting on the surface of his coat instead of hiding underneath.

Frequent bathing isn't a great option in the winter in Virginia, and while the hot towel method certainly works, it's neither efficient nor pain-free, as wetting my hands repeatedly in cold temperatures leads to chapped skin. Fortunately, there's a third option, and that's E3 Waterless Argan Oil Shampoo.

I curry, then spray my horse's coat with a thin layer of the shampoo, before using a soft brush to wipe the dust off my thin-skinned Thoroughbred. My hands stay warm and dry, and my horse looks clean and shiny when I'm done. The shampoo is made from natural ingredients, leaves no slippery residue and smells good too. The Argan oil makes his coat soft and minimizes static. A 32 oz. bottle lasts all winter, and it's become one of my go-to grooming tools whenever bathing is not an option.

You can buy E3 Waterless Argan Oil Shampoo from numerous tack shops and online retailers, and prices range from \$10-\$20 per bottle.

—SARA LIESER



PHOTO COURTESY SMARTPAK

To Stay Warm, But Not Too Warm

Virginia winters don't usually get too cold, but we can have some chilly, windy days, and that's when I need to bring out the winter breeches.

I tend to get warm pretty easily, even on the coldest days, so a pair of winter breeches that aren't super

thick are usually all I need to get through—no double layers for me. But I'm hardcore and ride through the winter months with no indoor, so breeches that can withstand the elements are essential, and I need something with a full seat, so I won't slip around.

That's where SmartPak's Piper Winter Softshell Breeches come in. They're made of a softshell exterior with brushed fleece interior. The outer material is smooth and wind resistant, so brushing off dirt, hay and anything else you might pick up at the barn is easy. I don't get too warm because of the fleece lining or feel too restricted because of the four-way stretch of the fabric.

They're mid-rise with a front zip, come in a large range of sizes, and are an affordable \$99.95 for the full-seat version. They've become a staple of my winter riding wardrobe. Learn more at SmartPak.com.

—LINDSAY BERRETH

To Make A Safety Statement

When Chronicle staff writer Lindsay Berreth wrote about multi-directional impact protection—a state-of-the-art helmet technology—I knew it was time to retire my entry-level helmet.

"In short, MIPS produces a liner that can be integrated into a helmet," Berreth wrote. "The liner allows the head to move 10-15 millimeters relative to the helmet in all directions on impact, thus reducing the rotational motion to the brain, which, according to their research, can reduce brain injuries in severity and in number."

Impressed by the technology, I went to DoverSaddlery.com and searched for MIPS-featured helmets. As someone who rides for pleasure a handful of times a month, I ruled out the more expensive options, and I narrowed it down to Trauma Void's line of \$179 models.

Unable to go in-store and determine my exact size, I made a safe choice in the Lynx™, which features an adjustable dial. The helmet has a comfortable fit, and it comes with a removable and washable Coolmax lining. My only negative takeaway is the external matte finish, which doesn't hide scuff marks, moisture or oil residue from fingerprints.

Beyond that, the helmet provides plenty of bang for your buck, and it could make a great gift for someone in your life in need of a safety upgrade, or for yourself, of course. Learn more or purchase at traumavoid.com.

—TORI REPOLE



PHOTO COURTESY DOVER SADDLERY



To Free Up Some Closet Space

I can't be the only person who's decided to pare down lately; it seems like everyone's operating in a more minimalist mindset since we all started spending a little more time at home and realizing just how much stuff we're surrounded by that we *do not need*.

But the fact does remain: If you're going to spend much time outside in the winter, with horses or otherwise, you do need some warm clothes. For the sake of simplicity these warm clothes need to be versatile though, which is why I own—and wear almost daily from September to May—a Patagonia R1

Fleece Pullover.

This mid-layer does it all. You can ride in it. You can hike and backpack in it. You can bike in it. You can sit around the house, tack room or campfire in it. Basically anything you need to do when it's under 60 degrees, this fleece can do. It's lightweight but still warm, and it has enough breathing and wicking capabilities to function during high-intensity exercise. It layers beautifully for conditions well below freezing. Best of all: It replaced about five other, lesser, fleeces and mid-layers in my closet. It's a win all around.

The R1 Pullover retails for \$129; learn more and purchase at Patagonia.com.

—LISA SLADE

“Horse Crazy: The Story Of A Woman And A World In Love With An Animal”

By Sarah Maslin Nir

Take it as a very good sign when a book is dedicated to a horse, and Sarah Maslin Nir’s “Horse Crazy” is dedicated to “every single one I’ve ever set eyes on.” It’s a perfect entry to this book, the readers of which are likely to be those among us who scout for horses all the time—in movies, on city streets and, of course, in books. (Who reads “Anna Karenina” for any reason other than Vronsky’s horse?)

Part memoir and part horse world explainer, “Horse Crazy” ranges widely. There are sections on Monty Roberts, Snowman, Thoroughbred racing, Black cowboys, the horses on stage at the opera. Nir’s New York background—she is currently a reporter at The New York Times—lends a special flavor as she writes, “By the time I was in my twenties, I figured that I’d discovered every last horse in New York City.” She shares accounts of riding on Wards Island, with an elderly urban-ranching couple, and with the mounted rangers in Central Park.

Some of her equestrian adventures come as part of her reporting life. When Nir encounters curly-eared Marwari horses in India, she writes, “[H]ere’s where the reporter in me occasionally relents to the horse girl who also rents space in my soul: I really don’t want to know why” their ears are curly. “Just like I’d rather imagine a million fantastical reasons for the rainbow that occasionally arches over the barn rather than the pedestrian reality of prisms and refracted light, I want to

believe Marwari ears are magic.”

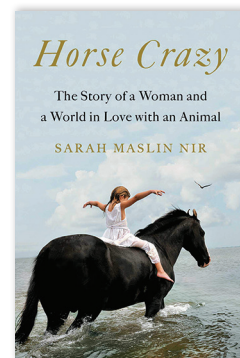
Throughout, Nir weaves in her own history with the more universal understanding of growing up besotted by horses. Her father, a Holocaust survivor, saw horse ownership as “proof the Nazis had lost.”

So it often seems it’s his influence that sends Nir on some excellent adventures for a horse-lover to read about—like riding in India—as well as into the depths of horsekeeping. Throughout, Nir shows the horseperson’s love for horses as individuals: Every horse here has a name. Reggie and Samson, Birchark, Brownie, Adonis and Occident, the horse Eadweard Muybridge famously photographed with all four feet off the ground. (Each chapter is named for a horse too.)

This is a book of intersections, reporter with horse girl, equestrian history with one woman’s life. It’s a book to pick up and travel through. Perhaps Nir’s most identifiable moment comes from a recollection she shares from her childhood. It explains so much about so many of us.

“I dreamed of Misty,” she writes. “Of how she lived wild and free and how a little girl not unlike me befriended and gentled her.”

—ELIZA MCGRAW



“Big Wishes For Little Feat”

By Cheryl Olsten

You probably know Lafitte De Muze from his many accolades in the biggest hunter classes with rider Amanda Steege. But owner Cheryl Olsten highlights his star quality in an entirely different, more creative way in her children’s book “Big Wishes For Little Feat.”

Olsten has based the book on her 2019 WCHR Hunter of the Year, but the story, while inspired by Lafitte, quickly becomes more imaginative than any real-life tale could be. This little horse has dreams he won’t give up on and the kind of otherworldly brilliance we all attribute to our own favorite horses, real or imagined. When a young girl named Ella enters the picture, my 11-year-old daughter knew where the plot was headed, but she

enjoyed the journey nevertheless.

Colorful and delightful artwork by Italian artist Paolo d’Altan—even on the gorgeous inside covers featuring gold constellations—carries the story beautifully from page to page.

If you’re looking for a gift for a young horse lover, “Big Wishes For Little Feat” is one you can enjoy alongside your child for a bedtime read that is sure to be pulled off the shelf over and over again.



—BETH RASIN

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Photo By Shelby Allen



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