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Article

CAZ GOES TO GRADE SCHOOL

By Tracy Porter

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Geez, going to school was never my favorite thing. From Montessori through College, I'd cry every time my mommy left me at school!

But going to grade school is quite fun for me now. For the last 5 years I've done a horse program at the local grade school in Milton. This Super Saturday is a 3-hour program (2 sessions) for all 1st through 3rd grade children in the school district. Kids sign up for their choices and somehow get placed in classes. Giddy Up is a favorite beating the other top choices (fishing and dogs) into the ground for popularity! And you can bet it's on the coldest morning in February, but there I am hauling in all sorts of visual things that will keep the kids interested.

I talk about the care horses need from daily grooming and feeding to routine vet care but also bandaging, clipping and hoof care. The kids have a ball trying to wrap miles of bandaging material around an imagined leg injury. And, of course we also do haltering, bridling and saddling.

My second year into it, I was planning again to take my favorite Paso fino mare, 19-year old Marny, but she shattered her pastern bone (this star actually did break a leg! All packed up but with no horse to go, I headed down the driveway. As I passed Caz in the front pasture, I heard him saying Hey, take me, ahem TAKE ME! and I thought why not? Fortunately, the school principal of the school is an equestrian horse nut, she was ecstatic and Caz thought it was pretty cool too. I figured he would help fill up some time and add a little realism. With my help, I could let the kids unload him, brush and then load him back up. Am I a genius, or what. Caz loved it too, it was a great training opportunity for this 3-year old stallion having to patiently wait and be led and groomed by the kids. Now I'm not stupid previously I've placed Caz in many demanding situations always insisting on impeccable manners and solid decorum.

The next year Marny had her cast off and was able to do the Super Saturday bit again. On the outside, Marny wasn't the prettiest horse in the barn anymore, but she still was gorgeous inside! I thought that was a good message for the kids to hear one just doesn't abandon an animal because she's old and not pretty anymore! Although, ours is indeed a throw-a-way society I have a responsibility to Marny, she can't simply be discarded and thrown away. For years, she'd given me unconditional love and always gave me 200%. She was also my best friend and now it was my turn to repay her and not expect anything in return. Marny had Cushing's disease. Among other things, this raises havoc with the hair coat. A few days before Super Saturday, she decided to shed her coat. It made her day to be doted on and brushed for hours. Even after the sessions were over and I was packing up to go home, Marny was still standing being brushed and petted by the older kids and their parents. The hair was still obligingly coming off and her mane and tail had been braided and re-braided until I thought they'd crack off!

Marny has always delighted in being groomed. For years, she was an ambassador for the therapeutic riding program that used our farm. But unfortunately, in only a few months I had to make a tough decision the medication wasn't helping, she was having difficulty getting up and moving; her pain could be ignored no longer. Now Marny's galloping in the lush pastures in heaven and if God has a favorite horse, I'm sure she's it. It was hard to say goodbye and it's hard still to write about it.

But now another February had rolled around and another Super Saturday. Feeling the void of not having Marny, I was not to anxious to go back into the school. But they were expecting me. So I reluctantly packed up the usual horse things that kids like to see, touch and use. But what horse could I take, there were 5 to choose from, but unfortunately, no Marny. All had already been to a school so were comfortable in and around crowds. The lucky one happened to be the one easiest to get that particular morning. It was Caz turn to go into the grade school, not just wait out in the trailer this year!

Actually he did wait in the trailer while I unloaded, but I was also waiting for him to unload! He did and off we went into the school. I was a bit concerned that he might suffer from nerves and a resulting loose stool so I took a blanket for him to stand on. Had I used a tarp, I was sure that he would bunch it up into a ball. Well, the blanket didn't even make the start of the first session. I warned my volunteers that buckets were near by just in case. It's really comforting to have people help that are actually horse people. This was my second year with Carol, whom I've known for years; Carol boarded her horse Butch at our farm. With her horse savvy, I've had her present things on grooming. I was showing the kids how horses get their fingernails trimmed and was working on a rear foot with his tail facing the kids. Soon I heard a little gas as he slowly lifted his tail and there I was holding the perfect stack. Carol quickly brought the bucket and I made Caz deposit. Of course there was the expected OOOH, ICK from the kids but we got back to business and told them how important it is for the horse to poop! The last 15-20 minutes the kids spend listening to the heart rate and breathing with a stethoscope, take his temperature and of course grooming and braiding. Each of us takes a side and directs the kids. I had the stethoscope and noticed the kids were walking up and putting their fingers in the corners of his mouth. When I had shown them how to properly bridle, I explained where there are no teeth. Caz was softly and patiently reopening his mouth, time after time after time. I told him I owed him big time at this point and if he could stand the next hour and a half I promised I'd never ever consider selling him or threatening him with the g-word!

In the next session, like the first I was again left holding a stack; you see there is an advantage to these smaller horses. Cake walk. While Carol was discussing grooming, I noticed Caz had perked up a little. I asked him to drop his head and he did. But I sensed that he wanted to move his feet. I glanced at my watch and thought geez he can only take being a star for 2 and a half hours. He continued to stand quietly, but I sensed there was something else and sure enough, he'd dropped. Oh great, now he'll be thumping himself. I stood next to him, stuck my fingers in his ear and slowly he pulled it in. Whew! But within the next 5 minutes it reappeared without warning and as he spread his back legs. I said in my most stentorian voice GET THE BUCKET. Since I was on the far side away from the kids I grabbed his unit. Now don't ask me why I put my finger over the top and sort of bent it to the side. Meanwhile, the bucket patrol let me down going to the wrong end of the horse. Caz quietly stood there but if you've ever kinked a hose and feeling the pressure building until WHOOSH! In retrospect, I don't know what possessed me to kink it or why I would have the business end pointing at MY face? And I can see you're thinking, those poor kids are scarred for life. Well if you must know being in the wrong place at the wrong time at least I was on the right side away from the audience of kids and no one except for the volunteers and I saw the resulting whoosh. For being such a short WHOOSH, it covered me, my face and yes I was talking at that moment. A little went on the carpet but accommodatingly I'd soaked up most of it. And Caz relieved to the utmost was suddenly left with only one attendant. Meanwhile, I washed my face fortunately, primary classrooms have sinks, but probably not for this reason. Carol resumed her demonstration on grooming and then began on tack and tacking the horse. There I stood uncomfortably holding Caz, I stunk, I was damp and wished I was in a shower. Well, Caz smelled me too and for the next 10 minutes, he stood curling up his nose and entertaining the kids. Little did they know he was just wondering where that good-looking stallion was that he was smelling! As the session was ending, the principal walked in and asked if the other kids could pet Caz on their way out. Still a bit flustered, I knew the redoubtable grapevine must have flashed our disaster abroad. Certain we'd never set foot in her school again, I said sure, everyone could pet him. And then the announcement came over the PA and I realized she meant the whole school as I heard her say. On your way out be sure to pet the horse. Geez, now I had to lead him back out though the halls as the other classes are unloading and stand outside in my urine soaked clothes. I am sure the parents were thinking horse people are nice but smelly! Caz proudly stood outside getting more attention than he ever dreamed possible. On my way home I thought I heard Caz say he wants to go again to school next year for Super Saturday!



Caz enjoys attention from the children.



The school says good bye to Caz.



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