

Chapter 6

Satisfaction

I was thirteen years old when my stable mate Jayne got a brand new saddle. It was a Billy Royal, hand tooled and loaded with the latest in Sterling Silver. Etched and raised in the center to look like berries, the Sterling sparkled next to the dark oiled leather and silver rolled cantle unique to the saddle maker.

To say that I was envious would be an understatement. My saddle was as old as the hills and handed down after my sister, Debbie, chose cheerleading over horseback riding. I had moved onto a new horse, Vandy, a lanky young mare whose tolerance for my teen-aged temperament matched my tolerance for waiting. I wanted a new saddle too, but try as I might, it was just not in the cards. I had three sisters and they had hobbies and Grandma was sick and Jennifer had camp and Cindy was graduating and the house caught on fire and Jayne was eighteen years old, for God's sake. Defeat, never an easy pill for me to swallow, fostered solemn determination.

The 1970s were a great time to be a kid. I could ride my bike anywhere in town without a worry from Mom. Cars, big and slow, were few and far between. Being the third daughter of four, I held the perfect place in my family. Jennifer, the youngest, required more attention than I. Cindy and Debbie, now sixteen and seventeen, were into bigger stuff than their bothersome little sister. Preserving the peace, I stayed quiet, tried not to make waves and avoided trouble or attention at all costs. I followed the rules, rode as often as possible and plotted a course to acquire a new saddle.

Taking every odd job available to a thirteen year old girl in 1975, I shoveled drive ways, swept sidewalks and did household chores for vacationing neighbors. I exercised horses for fellow boarders in their absence, watered plants and cleaned kitty litter boxes. I walked dogs, groomed horses, cleaned stalls, took down cob webs and babysat kids.

I hoarded money, saving until I gathered a few hundred dollars. Far short of what it would take to buy a saddle like my friend Jayne's, yet encouraged by my stash, I started looking at catalogues. Cutting out pictures of potential saddles, I found one perfect for me. The price seemed reasonable so I offered up my savings to help pay for the saddle.

Almost ten months had passed since Jayne received her saddle. September rolled along bringing another birthday for me. What better gift for a soon-to-be fourteen year old girl than a brand new saddle? Unfortunately, my dropped hints went unnoticed. Mom didn't give the pictures even a cursory glance – not a good sign. I resorted to begging but my requests fell on deaf ears.

Fourteen is an insignificant birthday to most teenagers; but, for a horse show kid, it has serious implications. At fourteen, kids move into the toughest age division for youth riders. The youngest of the 14-18 division, some must also suffer the various and utterly apparent developmental changes, or lack thereof, that occur between the ages of 14 and almost 19. A fourteen year old girl can be at a serious disadvantage in the older age group.

My fourteenth birthday was a sad day. A class win would most likely be a long time in coming – and there was no mention of a new saddle, not even an I-owe-you, a present my parents developed after discovering how expensive it was to outfit a horse. Resolute, I continued to take any cash paying job working to increase my stash.

Spring in Wisconsin is a renaissance. Spiny sprigs of bright green grass courageously struggle to sprout through the dirty snow. Tulips vividly bloom brightening gardens around town. My lungs filled with the fragrance of lilacs as I rode my bike home from school one fine spring day. Peddling through puddles of melted snow, the rooster tail from my wheels threw cold water on my back. Yikes that was chilly! Looking at my hand-me-down bike it suddenly dawned on me – there might be another way to get a new saddle.

The Lynn family had a deal: Mom and Dad bought our first bike. For our second bike, each child paid for one third and Mom and Dad picked up the remainder. After that we were on our own. Cindy long ago bought her own bike and Debbie cruised around on her second bike, when she wasn't fighting Cindy for the car. I rode – hmmm – Debbie's *first* bike. Mom and Dad had never purchased *any* bike for me.

Knowing a saddle like Jayne's was out of the question, I found one for far less money. Scouting through magazines I discovered plenty of reputable saddle makers. Choosing one with a price tag I hoped would meet Dad's approval, I approached my parents with a new deal.

Recognizing a saddle would cost much more than any bike, I offered my stash to help pay for the new saddle. My earnings were enough to pay for well over half but I would still need help. If Mom and Dad paid the balance, I promised to never ask for money for a bike. At last, a deal was struck and the saddle ordered.

The saddle I found was made in the heart of horse country. The Ryon family name is steeped in the tradition of Texas saddle makers. Hand tooled in Fort Worth, the saddles were thrown on the backs of the best horses in the country. From cutting horses to pleasure horses, the saddles were known for their functional craftsmanship. The new saddle was far less fancy than Jayne's, and by now, two years newer. But it was not a hand me down. The saddle was all mine and I had earned the right to be proud of its purchase.

In the years to come, I swung that saddle on hundreds of horses. It was a show saddle before becoming a work saddle – the first of many tools of my trade. My Ryon saddle helped earn my first dollars in the horse business providing a means for me to carry out my profession. But more than anything, it served as a source of satisfaction – the reward – a fine compensation for the efforts spent. Using available resources, I fulfilled a wish and unleashed a means to gratification I would not otherwise have known. By denying a desire, my parents, once again, gave me a gift. Providing for myself, I found satisfaction in what first appeared to be a hardship.

*Satisfaction comes easily to those willing
to persist in their pursuits,
no matter the result.*