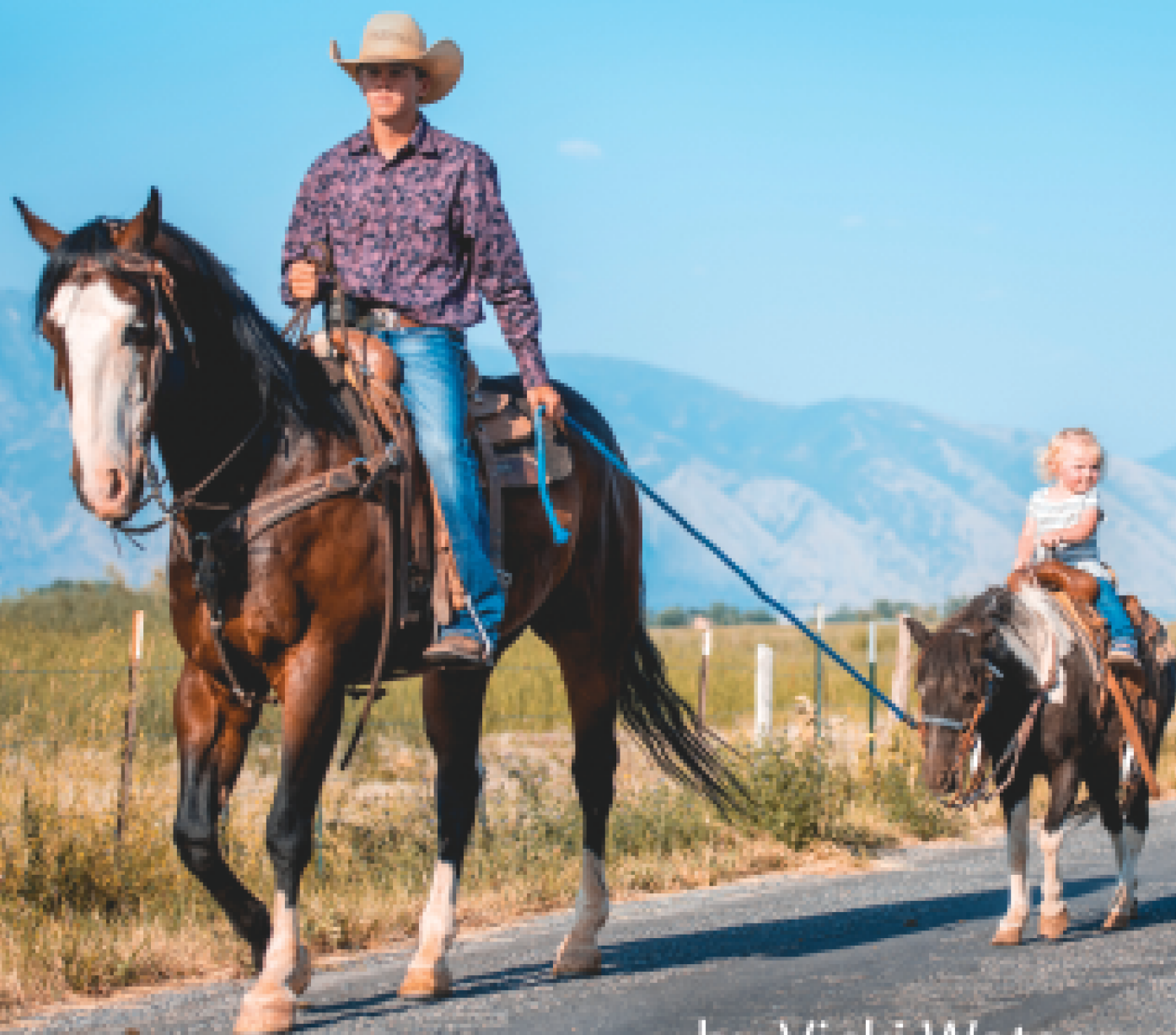


# Following *the* Narrow Path

*Devotions From the World of Horses*



by Vicki Watson

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# INTRODUCTION

*Many believe that becoming a Christian will make your life easy, but Jesus said the path that leads to eternal life is narrow, difficult, and hard to find. In this devotional, I share some of my experiences in finding and staying on that narrow path. I hope my stories will encourage you on your journey.*

The truths of the Bible can be understood intellectually, but those truths are more fully absorbed through life experiences that shed additional light on them and drive them deeper into our hearts. We can know theoretically what it means to forgive someone, however a deeper understanding of that word is gained when we must forgive someone who has wronged us.

God leads us through various life experiences to embed His truths deep within us. The truth doesn't change, but the lessons He sends to imprint those truths on us will be specific to each believer. Spiritual truths have been confirmed to me through the horses God has blessed me with. I share some of those experiences and insights in this devotional.

I'm not a Hebrew and Greek scholar, but I've always been fascinated with words, their origins, and meanings. I didn't become a Christian until my late twenties. At that time, I begged the pastor of the church I attended to have a Bible study. He refused. Unfortunately, I've had some bad church experiences over the years.

But God worked even that out for good. He steered me to a church with a Kay Arthur Precepts study on James. What a perfect start to my study of the Bible! Not only did I learn a lot about the book of James, I learned how to study the Bible for myself. Among other things, Kay Arthur explained how to find the words in the original languages and look up their meaning. I still love it when I uncover a gem when looking up a word from the Bible.

Many of the devotions address our behavior and attitudes. Our study of the Bible should produce wisdom we apply in our lives not just head knowledge.

I'm confident my position on that aligns with scripture. We don't perform good deeds to earn our way into heaven. But after we are saved through faith in Christ, we will have a desire to serve God out of love for Him. That will inevitably result in fruit being produced. A lack of fruit should be a cause for concern.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as our way of life.

*Ephesians 2:8-10*

I believe the Bible is God's inerrant word, which I interpret literally unless it's clearly intended to be symbolic.

The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making wise the simple.  
The precepts of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart;  
the commandments of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.  
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;  
the judgments of the LORD are true, being altogether righteous.  
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.  
By them indeed Your servant is warned; in keeping them is great reward.

*Psalms 19:7-11*

Horses are a favorite “proof” for evolutionists. I believe the opposite. Horses seem to be one of God’s favorite animals. For anyone with an open mind, the complexity of their design points to an intelligent designer.

I mention several racehorses in this book. That doesn’t mean I endorse horse racing. There are many evils connected with the sport, but horses love to run. The fact that people turn that into something bad doesn’t take away from the horses’ amazing athletic abilities.

The primary translation used for the quoted scriptures is the Berean Study Bible. It’s a newer translation (2016), comparable to the ESV. The translation is a product of the Bible Hub ([biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com)). Although it is copyrighted (to maintain its accuracy), the publisher’s intent is to allow a more free distribution of God’s word.

I hope this book helps you to see God working through the animals, people, and everyday events in your own life.

Many of the photos are ones I’ve taken. Check out the notes at the end of the book for comments about each of my photos.

Special thanks to:

Pat Marvenko Smith, [revelationillustrated.com](http://revelationillustrated.com), for permission to use her Four Horsemen and Christ on a White Horse artwork.

And Nadina Ironia, [ironia-art.com](http://ironia-art.com), for permission to use her Secretariat painting.



*(Sassy and I performing in a drill team, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left)*

## WHY THIS OBSESSION WITH HORSES?

I don't know where the longing came from or when it started. I can't remember a time when I didn't want a horse.

The librarian in our small town must have understood horse-crazy girls. Perhaps she had been one herself. All the horse books were stored on a shelf right at my eye level. In those days, a library was a silent place. The quiet contributed to my awe of this building full of books. Those horse books pulled me like a magnet to their shelf. I carefully selected a book and took it to the large desk at the back of the library. The prim and proper librarian removed the card from the pocket in the book, stamped it with the due date, and handed it to me. I neatly printed my name, smiled shyly, and handed the card back to her.

Back home, I devoured each book, dreaming of the day I would have my own horse. One afternoon, I saw the teenage neighbor ride into our backyard on her horse. She must have noticed me staring at her. "Would you like a ride?"

Too shy to speak to her, I nodded. She helped me up behind the saddle. I wrapped my arms around her waist, and we were off. To a scrawny, eight-year-old girl, the palomino seemed like the tallest and most beautiful horse in the world. I inhaled the aroma of horsehair and leather, listened to the squeak of the saddle and the thud of the horse's hooves on the hard ground.

After a brief lap around the yard, she helped me down, and I ran my hands over the palomino's soft coat. The neighbor never returned, but that one ride was enough for me to be hooked. My longing for a horse grew so intense it seemed my whole body ached. I thought about horses constantly, read about them, and drew pictures of them.

One night, I dreamed someone gave me a plastic, inflatable horse. As I blew into the toy, it began to take shape. When fully inflated, the toy horse came to life. Finally, I had a horse of my very own! I was so excited—until I woke up.

I cried when I realized the horse, that had been so alive in my dream, didn't really exist.

I was very quiet and shy even with my parents. They were aware of my longing although I'm sure they didn't understand it.

Later that year, I spotted my father walking down the road, leading a small, silver dapple pony. Cricket came with a beautiful saddle—black leather with a red, stitched seat.

It turned out to be one of those fortunately-unfortunately stories. Fortunately, I now had a real, live pony. But unfortunately, the pony wasn't trained. Cricket bucked me off or ran away with me every time I tried to ride her. I wasn't hurt, and Cricket's behavior didn't diminish my love for horses.

The following year, we moved to a small farm where my dad began to raise pigs. A neighbor, Mr. Steffens, had several well-trained horses and ponies. His own children were young, so I became the Steffens' "adopted" farm-hand daughter, helping with work around their place. In exchange, he taught me how to ride.

Mr. Steffens traded a stocky, bay pony, Dolly, to us in exchange for Cricket and one of my dad's pigs. Now, I had a pony of my own I could actually ride! Dolly was twelve hands tall. She was also trained to pull a cart.

Mr. Steffens offered to take Dolly and me to local horse shows, but I didn't have any show clothes. In exchange for painting their chicken coop, the Steffens took me to a nearby tack shop and bought me an outfit to show in.

In those days, you didn't need the fancy, expensive outfits worn in horse shows today. I remember being delighted with a red-checked western shirt, black jeans, and a black cowboy hat. For several years, I had a great time traveling with the Steffens family to shows.

Dolly had a wonderfully smooth jog, but she was too lazy to canter much. I didn't win many ribbons, but enough to keep me happy. It didn't matter that Dolly wasn't a great show horse. She was mine, and I loved her.

Those are some of my best childhood memories. The Steffens family played a big role in my life. They were Christians, and looking back from an adult perspective, I see how they put their faith into action by reaching out to a shy, lonely, horse-crazy girl.

From the perspective of many years, I know my intense childhood longing for a horse, even when fulfilled, would never ultimately satisfy. Horses were the wrong object of my longing. God saw fit to grant the desires of that insecure little girl, and I hope I have used my horses in a way that is honoring to Him.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs after You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God.

*Psalm 42:1,2*

For a while in my early adult life, I was horseless. During those years, I never lost my love for horses. I subscribed to a magazine called *The Perfect Horse*, a publication by Christian trainer, John Lyons. Lyons occasionally inserted Christian principles into the magazine that related to his experience with horses. My faith was new at the time, and I appreciated his spiritual insights. But it was another trainer, Lew Sterrett, who really opened my eyes to the similarity of a horse's relationship to his master and our relationship to God. It's not a perfect comparison by any means, but real-life examples can make spiritual concepts more understandable and memorable.

By then, I had three daughters. I wanted them to have the opportunity to enjoy horses as I had. My girls and I attended a horse exposition, Equine Affaire, in Columbus. They held a special church service in the coliseum on Easter Sunday.

Lew Sterrett entered the ring, riding one horse and leading another—a pretty roan mare named Jessie. He was given the mare because no one else had been able to tame her. Whenever anyone tried to ride her, Jessie would rear up so high she sometimes fell over backward. This is one of the most dangerous behaviors for a horse. Sterrett demonstrated the rearing as he tried to get on the mare.

He explained how Jessie's rebelliousness was like people rebelling against God. If Jessie had submitted to training, she would have been useful to her master and well cared for. But she didn't have much of a future in her current state—as a dangerous, unrideable horse.

It's the same with us. When we refuse to submit to God, we miss out on what He wants to accomplish in our lives.

Some might raise their eyebrows at attending a horse expo on Easter Sunday, but it's been twenty-five years since that presentation with Jessie, and Sterrett's message is still fresh in my mind. Later that year, my girls and I attended one of Sterrett's *Sermon on the Mount* presentations. He covered training principles in more detail and explained how they related to Christian discipleship. I absorbed a lot, but most of his talk went over my daughters' heads.



By the following year, we were back in the horse business. The *Parable of the Pink Jacket* explains how that came about.

I believe the interests and material possessions God gives us are intended to be used to reach out to others. With the examples of Lyons and Sterrett in the back of my mind, I decided to use our horses to start the Christian Cowgirl Club. My daughters and I held summer day camps where we helped girls learn to care for and ride horses. We also had crafts, music, snacks, and a lesson that conveyed a spiritual message through the horses.

Lew Sterrett's insights were too high level, so I brought the lessons down several notches for the girls. The more I thought about the parallels between my own experiences with horses and my relationship to God, the more examples I came up with on my own.

God helped me out by sending a lot of animals our way who had unique, quirky personalities.



## THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

When I received Cricket, my silver-dapple Shetland pony, I thought I was in heaven—that is until the first time I rode her.

I climbed onto that beautiful saddle, and Cricket promptly bucked me off. She took off running across several neighbors' yards into a vacant field. That's the way all my riding sessions on Cricket went.

I wasn't the only one surprised with a pony that day. Cricket was half of a matched pair that were sold at an auction. The other half was a gelding named Jumper. My dad and a friend pooled their money to buy the two ponies. The neighbor girls who received Jumper were friends of mine.

Mary and Jane weren't crazy about horses as I was, so they were also surprised when their father brought a pony home. As it turned out, Jumper was better trained than Cricket—or maybe he simply had a more easy-going disposition. I watched in amazement as my friends rode their pony around the field behind their house.

That's the first time I recall being envious. It wasn't that I wanted to take Jumper from my friends; I just couldn't understand why they had gotten the better pony. I was the one that loved horses, and I was stuck with a pony I couldn't ride. In some ways, it was worse than having no pony at all.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

*Philippians 4:12 NKJV*

It was many years ago that I received that pony. I wish I could say I've mastered the art of being content, but unfortunately, at times, I still struggle with it. The problem creeps up here and there in various forms—wishing for a better horse, a better barn (with an indoor arena), a more beautiful saddle, a nice truck, or a higher income.

When I stop and think about it, I realize those are all wants rather than needs. I don't actually need any of those things. God has already blessed me beyond anything I deserve.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,

*James 1:17*

Just as we feel disappointed when someone doesn't seem to appreciate a gift we've carefully selected for them, it must hurt God when I don't appreciate the gifts He's given to me.

The year after my dad bought Cricket, our family moved to a small farm. Dad traded Cricket—and a pig—to a neighbor for a pony named Dolly. I learned to ride at their stable, and my disappointment with Cricket was soon forgotten. My lifelong horse and pony adventure had begun!



### 3

## PARABLE OF THE PINK JACKET

The first year my daughters and I attended the horse exposition, Equine Affaire, my youngest daughter, Julie, was four years old. The expo ran for four days in mid-April, from Thursday through Sunday. When we prepared to leave home for the first day of the event, I grabbed a cute, pink jacket for Julie to wear.

As we wandered around that day, taking in the horse exhibits and demonstrations, the weather grew unusually warm. At some point, I noticed Julie no longer had her jacket. We'd been in at least five different barns on the sprawling fairgrounds. None of us had any idea where she had lost it. I was certain we would never see that jacket again.

We enjoyed the exhibits and clinics each day, but that Sunday was Easter, and a special church service had been organized by Christian horse trainer, John Lyons. During the service, one man explained that he'd first gotten involved with horses when a young woman, soon to be heading off to college, drove past his farm. It looked like a perfect place for a horse to live, so she stopped to ask if he would like to have her expensive show horse.

At that time, I was horseless and feeling a bit sorry for myself. No one had ever given me a horse.

Later in the service, one of the leaders asked everyone to stand who had witnessed a miracle. A surprising number of people stood. Again I wondered why I'd never had that experience.

After we left the church service, it was almost time for Equine Affaire to end. Everyone began closing down their exhibits. My girls wanted to go back to a particular barn one last time before leaving the expo. We walked around, gazing at the beautiful horses, then headed for the door to leave for home.

As we walked in front of one of the last booths, a woman held something up in the air, asking the lady next to her if she knew whether there was a "Lost and Found."

There, dangling right in front of me, was Julie's pink jacket!

I hadn't given the jacket a thought since it had disappeared several days earlier, and I didn't remember stopping at that booth the day the jacket was lost. I have no idea how it ended up there.

The timing was eerily perfect. My daughters had picked that barn to visit one last time. We just happened to walk past the booth at the precise moment the woman held up the jacket. (I had just met Sissy Burggraf of Lost Acres Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation that year, but we have been friends since that day.)

I realized we had just experienced our own small-scale miracle. God was trying to get something through my thick head.

In the next weeks, some exciting things happened. We located a pony, Ebony, that was "child-safe," and my husband agreed to buy her for our daughters. Then, we got a call from my mom. Someone she worked with had an extra horse they weren't using. The woman wanted to



lease her to us for the summer—  
for \$1.00!

This all happened so soon  
after the recovery of Julie's jacket, I  
began to think of it as the *Parable  
of the Pink Jacket*.

The pink jacket object lesson  
reminded me that God is in  
control. I needed to stop  
complaining and worrying. God is  
more than capable of providing for  
me.

It was amazing that those  
horses suddenly appeared for us,  
but I realized I needed to be  
content with what I had—whether  
it was two horses or no horses!  
God had already blessed me  
tremendously. It was sinful to  
complain about anything I didn't have.

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

*Ephesians 3:20-21*



## THE BEST GIFT

Gary Chapman, author of the book, *The 5 Love Languages*, describes different categories for how we express and receive love. They're listed, in no particular order, to the right.

It's possible for the ways you receive love to differ from the ways you best express it. Gifts aren't at the top of my list for receiving love, but gift giving is my second-best way to express love—after quality time.

My favorite experience of gift giving was buying a horse for my oldest daughter's birthday. Buying a horse is always an interesting experience. I've found that you should trust no one when going horse shopping.

This was in the days before the internet, so I was scanning newspapers and our local *County Classifieds*. I came across an ad for a palomino mare, unregistered but mostly Quarter Horse, about an hour from where we lived. After arranging for some Grandma time for the girls, I set off to check out the horse.

When I arrived, a young woman greeted me and led me to the barn. She opened the stall door, and the mare moseyed out. Maggie stood calmly in the aisle, unhaltered, as the woman groomed her. She had apparently had a long fixation on the palomino's tail. Due to this careful attention, Maggie's tail was sparkling white.

Maggie didn't possess perfect conformation. Her neck and shoulders were too narrow in comparison to her large hindquarters, a somewhat pear-shaped horse. It was the mare's calm temperament that impressed me.

I asked a variety of questions. The owner's answers shifted based on what she thought I wanted in a horse. At one point, she told me how fast Maggie was, that she had once outrun her husband's contesting horse. After experiencing the reality of Maggie for many years, that statement still brings a smile. The mare wasn't fond of running—ever. If she outran a contesting horse, the woman's husband should have gotten a new one!

Despite the owner's attempt to portray Maggie as a racehorse (the opposite of what I wanted), I decided to buy the mare. The horse's behavior seemed to be more honest than the woman's words. I arranged to pick her up the following week.

This was all top secret, of course. My girls knew nothing about it. I worried that my mom, not known for her ability to keep a secret, would let something slip, but she managed to keep quiet this time.

The day I went to pick up our new horse, a friend rode along with me. Once again, I sent the girls to my mom's. We made it back home and got Maggie situated. I placed a big "Happy Birthday" poster covered with bows and ribbons on her stall door.

After we finished, I called Mom to let her know it was time for the big reveal. When they arrived, my friend said she wanted to see our pony, Ebony. The girls led the way to the barn, eager to show off their pony. As we entered, a palomino head turned toward us over a stall door. I couldn't stop grinning as it slowly registered on my girls, and especially my oldest, what this was all about.

Maggie was not only the calmest horse we ever owned, but the calmest one I've EVER seen. Nothing bothered her. She would travel along any trail or down a city street in the middle of a noisy parade without batting an eye. Maggie rarely even looked to the side. Head low, facing straight ahead, the mare just kept going wherever you pointed her. Years after buying her, the previous owner called me, wanting to buy her back. By then, she had a little boy and wanted Maggie for his horse, but we had no intention of parting with her.

Coincidentally, our pony Ebony's previous owner later tried to buy her back, also. A good horse is truly hard to find. I've had a variety of horses over the years, but Maggie and Ebony were by far the best. Many happy memories are connected to those two. Both were with us until the end, and I still miss them.

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Physical touch
- Acts of service
- Receiving gifts



That was the most fun I had giving a gift. But, of course, God is the greatest gift giver of all.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

*John 3:16*

Jesus said this to Nicodemus, explaining what was required for one to be born again. This one verse summarizes all God went through to make our salvation possible. Not only is John 3:16 the best known and most quoted verse from the Bible, it consists of multiple “greatests.”

**For God**—the greatest Giver  
**so loved**—the greatest love  
**the world**—the greatest number of recipients  
**that He gave**—the greatest act  
**His one and only Son**—the greatest Gift  
**that everyone who believes in Him**—the greatest opportunity  
**shall not perish**—the greatest promise  
**but**—the greatest difference  
**have eternal life**—the greatest reward

I hope you have experienced this incredible gift from God!

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow.

*James 1:17*



## SACRIFICE—JET’S STORY

An idea came to me years ago for a story about a young girl’s pony who died while protecting her newborn foal from an attack by a coydog (coyote-dog hybrid).

I’d never had a secret desire to write a book, and I was reluctant to write this story, unsure whether I could make it believable. On the other hand, I didn’t want to make it too believable, either. People would hate me for “killing” a kid’s pony—even if it was only a fictional one. A close friend told me absolutely not to write it—it would be too sad.

But the idea would not leave me alone. It bounced around in my head to the point that it was driving me crazy. I considered what my friend had said about it being too sad.

Why wasn’t it too sad for Christian parents to tell their children about Jesus’ horrible death on the cross? Was a pony more important than Jesus?

The following excerpt from *Rosie and Scamper* picks up midway through the book, after the grandmother discovered Rosie’s pony, Jet, had died. Grandma rescued the foal, Scamper, and spent the night in the barn caring for him. Early the next morning, the granddaughter, Rosie, and her mother, Kristy, arrive at the stable to



help care for the horses. When Rosie learns of her pony's death, she asks the hard question, "Why?" The grandmother attempts to explain how the actions of Jet, in dying to save her foal, are like Christ giving His life for us.

"Mom! Mom!" Rosie shrieked. "Jet had her foal! Come and see!" She ran toward her mother, then turned and went back to the foal's stall.

"Grandma, where's Jet? Why isn't she with her baby?" Rosie opened the stall door. She placed one arm around Scamper's neck and stroked his forehead with the other. The foal found one of her fingers and sucked, thinking he had found his breakfast. Rosie laughed with delight. "He's trying to eat my finger!"

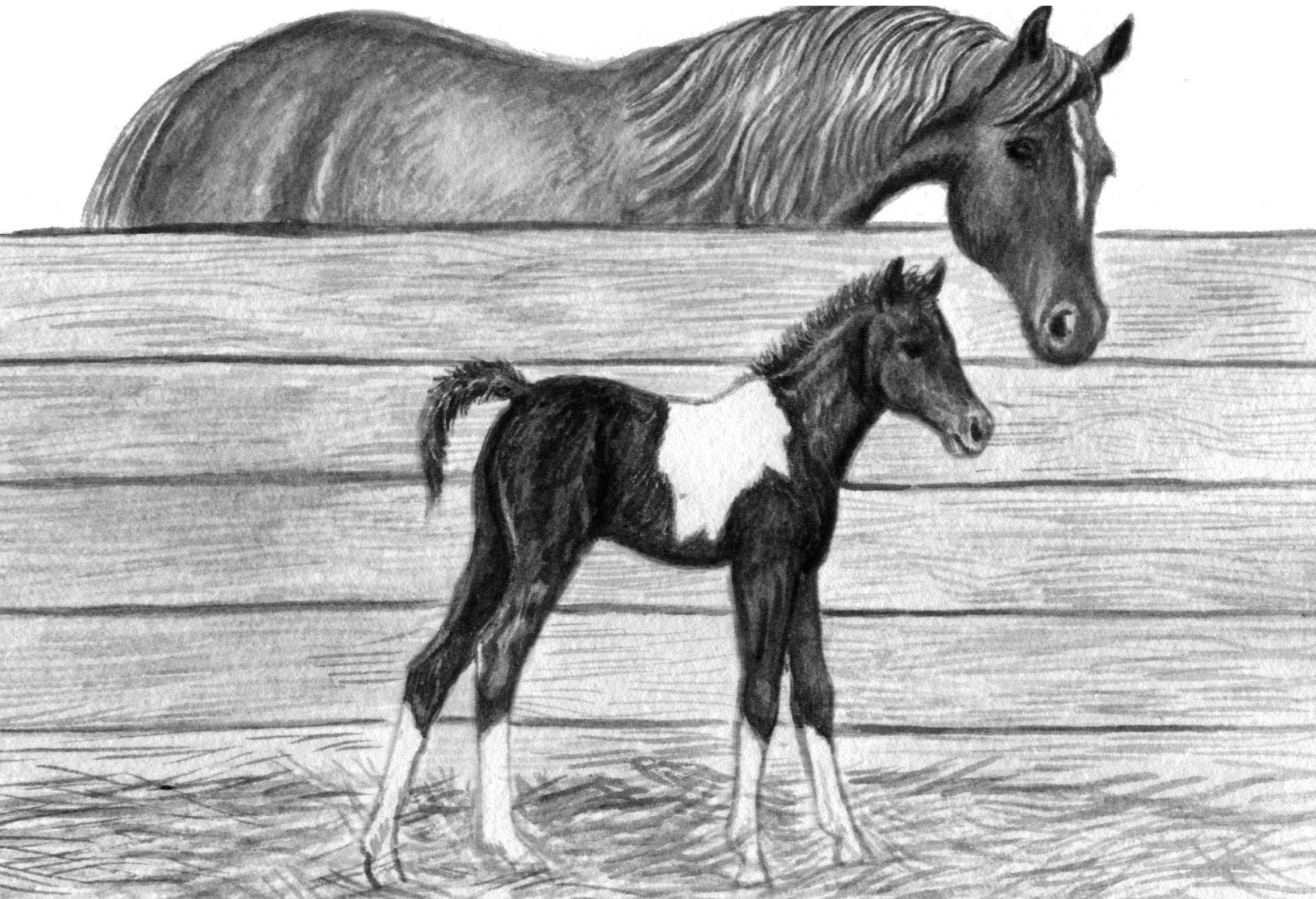
Grandma walked over and wearily sat down on the tack box, tears streaming down her cheeks. She took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "Rosie, would you come here for a minute?"

"Aw, but I want to play with the baby." Rosie reluctantly stepped out of the stall, gently pushing the foal back enough so she could close the door. She looked in the stall to the left of Scamper's. "Where is Jet?"

Grandma patted the tack box, motioning for Rosie to sit beside her. Kristy sat on the other end. As Grandma explained the events of the night before, all three held each other and cried.

Finally, Rosie was able to speak. "Why, Grandma? Why did my pony have to die? It's not fair."

Grandma brushed away more tears. Would they never end?



She had cried so much the night before, she couldn't believe she had any tears left. "Rosie, I won't pretend to understand why this happened. But I know God can use the painful things in our lives for good."

Grandma closed her eyes briefly and silently prayed for words that would help Rosie understand. "The Bible says that God knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. God created Jet, and He loved her as much, or more, than you and I did. You know the verse John 3:16, right?"

Rosie nodded slowly. Jemimah jumped into her lap, and she absently stroked the cat's head.

"When it says 'God gave His only Son,' it's talking about when Jesus came and lived as a man on earth."

Rosie's tears slowed, but Grandma sensed she had no idea what this had to do with Jet.

"Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He gave His life for ours, so we could have eternal life. Why would He do that for us?"

Rosie shrugged.

"That's what the 'For God so loved the world' part of the verse is about. Jesus came because of God's amazing love for us."

Grandma continued. "The animal that attacked Jet was what some people call a coydog, part coyote and part dog, probably starving after the hard winter. Being part dog, they are less fearful than coyotes. Since the foal was weak and helpless, it probably went after him first. When Jet tried to protect her foal, it attacked her. Do you see now? Jet loved her baby so much; she gave her life so he could live."

"It's not exactly the same, of course," Grandma added. "But what Jet did for her foal helps me understand what Jesus did for me—for all of us."

Grandma watched Rosie turn this over in her mind.

"I kind of understand, but it doesn't make me feel any better."

"I know. It will hurt for a long time." Grandma nodded sadly. "Jet made many children happy by teaching them how to ride. Maybe someday the story of her death can do something even better if it helps them understand what Christ did for us on the cross."

"I don't think I could tell anyone about it," Rosie said slowly.

"It will take time." They sat together quietly for several minutes, then Grandma broke the silence by blowing her nose on a damp wad of tissues retrieved from her coat pocket. "I named him Scamper. He needs to be fed every two hours for the next few days. Will you help me take care of him?"

Rosie shrugged. "I guess so."

"You can stay here with Grandma for a few days," Kristy offered. "I mean—if you feel up to it."

Grandma stood up, feeling her age for the first time in her life. Her back ached as she returned to the tack room for Scamper's bottle. After cleaning it and mixing a fresh batch of milk, she held it out to her granddaughter.

Rosie sniffed and raised her hand to take the bottle. "What do I do with it?"

"He knows what to do," Grandma said.

Rosie nudged Jemimah off her lap and shuffled toward the stall. Grandma slid the door open. Scamper butted the bottle and eagerly began to drink.

"Tip it up so the milk comes out more easily," Grandma said.

Rosie smiled briefly through her tears as the hungry little colt energetically attacked the bottle she held with both hands.

Over the next few months, Rosie and Grandma spent many hours at the barn caring for Scamper. Each day, the time between his feedings was gradually extended. As he grew stronger, they taught him to drink his milk from a bucket instead of the bottle. He also began to nibble at small bits of hay and grain.

Jet was buried in the back pasture beside her mother, Ebony. Rosie and Grandma remembered with sadness and joy the pony they had loved so dearly.

No other pony/horse (or human) dies in the series. Was I right to put something so sad in that first book? I debated back and forth on it years ago and obviously decided to do it—for several reasons.

Children experience the death of dearly loved pets. I still remember the death of a cat from when I was very young. It's a sadness everyone who loves animals goes through, sometimes repeatedly. The story shows that it's normal and acceptable to cry and grieve for them.

Love and sadness seem intertwined. If we love, we'll most likely experience loss and the resulting sadness, whether it's the death of an animal or a person.

C. S. Lewis experienced this when his wife died from cancer. "The pain I feel now is the happiness I had before. That's the deal."

Children who grow up in Christian families hear about the crucifixion of Christ from a young age. It's easy to lose the emotional impact of the suffering He went through for us, simply because we've heard it so often. By having Jet die, I wanted the emotional response to be strong and real, something young people could relate to. The comparison between a pony dying to protect her foal and Jesus' death on the cross is imperfect, but I think it's close enough to give children a deeper appreciation for Christ's sacrifice for us.

Death, disease, and other types of evil happen because of our sin and the curse on this world. I don't believe God is pleased with any of that, but He can use bad experiences in the lives of believers to bring about good.

And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.

*Romans 8:28*

Rosie doesn't see this happen immediately. It's not a magic formula—and it doesn't erase the sadness of our traumatic experiences. But later in the book, Jet's story is one of the seeds planted in the life of another character, Carrie, that helps her come to Christ.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

*John 15:13*



## 6

### KINGDOM OF DARKNESS

Sometimes God reveals things to me in His word, and I see a confirmation or parallel in the world of horses. Other times, I see things when working with horses that remind me of a verse or scriptural principle.

One day, I was captivated by the thought expressed in Colossians 1:13. Here it is in several versions.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, NIV

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, NLT

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: KJV

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, NKJV

He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, GNT

He has rescued [rhyomai] us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into [methistēmi] the kingdom of His beloved Son, BSB

**rhyomai**—to draw to one's self, to rescue, to deliver. This is the same word used in Matthew 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver [rhyomai] us from the evil one.

**methistēmi**—to transpose, transfer, translate, remove from one place to another; of a change of situation or place

Before we are saved, we live in a kingdom of darkness. God can rescue us from that darkness, but many choose to remain there. If we allow Him to, He will scoop us up out of the dark and deposit us into the kingdom of light, ruled by His beloved Son, Jesus.

Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

*John 3:19*

Have you ever suddenly left a dark place and faced bright sunlight? It's a drastic change. Your eyes want to close, and you blink until they become accustomed to the light. But it's a wonderful change. Light is superior to gloomy darkness.

As I considered this transference from a kingdom of darkness to a kingdom of light, I thought of the ponies who worked underground in coal mines.

The first recorded use of horses or ponies in mines in Britain was in 1750. The Mining Act of 1842 limited the use of children as workers in the mines. This resulted in ponies taking over many of the jobs the young miners had previously performed.

Because the mine tunnels were low and narrow, small ponies, averaging twelve hands or less, were best suited for the work. Shetland was the most common breed. Geldings were used almost exclusively because they had fewer behavioral issues than mares and stallions. The British Coal Mines Act of 1911 required ponies to be at least four years old before they could work in the mines. By 1913, there were 70,000 pit ponies working in the UK.

The pony's training began when he arrived at the colliery (coal mine). But no amount of training could prepare the animals for what they would experience in the mines.

When his brief harness training was complete, the day came for the pony to begin work. In a deep-shaft mine, that meant a trip to the bottom. Small ponies traveled down in a cage-like elevator similar to the one used to transport the miners. Larger ponies and horses were lowered down the shaft in a sling.

The horses which draw the wagons on the underground railways are sometimes sent down into the mine fastened to a rope, but generally in the English collieries on a properly constructed platform and cage, either in nets or baskets. When the former mode is adopted the horses do not make the slightest movement, being paralysed with fear and to all appearances dead, but when they reach the bottom of the pit they gradually recover their senses.

*Bright, p. 33*

As he began his work underground, the pony pulled empty tubs behind an experienced animal. The narrowest passages left at most a foot, sometimes only inches, on either side of the coal cars. The driver often had to stoop to avoid banging his head on the roof. If the inexperienced pony became frightened, he couldn't run away—there was no place to go. I feel claustrophobic just thinking about that.

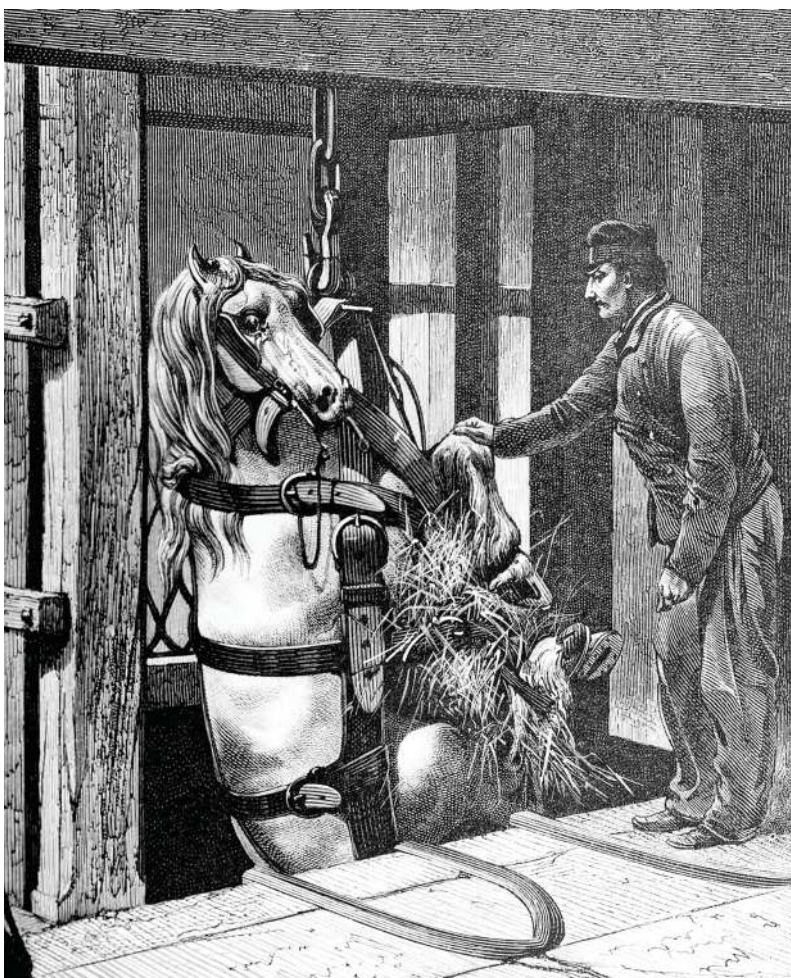
In deep mines, the ponies didn't return to the surface after each shift, but were housed in an underground stable which might contain up to a hundred animals. The stable was located at a distance from the main tunnels to provide a quiet area for the ponies to rest. Since they had to constantly keep their heads low when traveling through the tunnels, the stable roofs were required to be high enough for the ponies to raise their heads when stalled. To reduce the risk of fire, very little wood was used in the stable. Walls were typically rock or brick. Most stables were white to help spread the dim lighting.

The pit ponies are special to me because my pony, Toby, is the size of many of those who worked the mines. If he'd been born in a different time and place, Toby might have been dangled, petrified, from a sling that lowered him to the bottom of a mine shaft where he would have spent his lifetime pulling heavy coal carts through dark tunnels.

Some of the pit ponies spent their entire working lives underground while other mines gave the ponies a two-week holiday each year. Those who experienced the luxury of that vacation were released into a pasture near the mine where they were able to briefly enjoy the life of a normal horse.

The ponies' transition from the depth of the mine to a pasture reminds me of Colossians 1:13.

Imagine the sheer delight of those hard-working ponies when they were raised from the drab darkness of the mine into the sunshine and beautiful colors of the world above. Green grass!





I can picture them, once their eyes adjusted to the light, being undecided whether they should gallop about, roll on the soft ground, or of course—graze on the beautiful grass. I’ve watched Toby do the last two almost simultaneously. He sometimes lies down to roll and snatches a few bites of grass while he’s down.

As Christians rescued by God, we never have to return to that old kingdom of darkness. The poor ponies did. After their brief vacation, they were once again lowered down the shaft to resume their work in the mine.

Although the work was hard, pit ponies weren’t often mistreated. The miners’ income depended on getting as much coal out as possible. It was common for the drivers to form a strong bond with their equine partners. They bragged of the intelligence, strength, or heroic deeds of their pony.

Miners respected the sixth sense the ponies had, which allowed them to detect danger. Young miner, Eric Squires, relates such an incident with his pony, Ben.

“He [Ben] backed off, then darted forward to within five or six yards of me before spinning and moving quickly away again... He was acting like a dog asking his master to follow. Suddenly as he turned to face me again, he screamed... I recall the icy shiver that went through me.

Once again he screamed and I knew then that he wanted me to follow him. I did, dropping my snap-tin [lunch pail], snatching up my lamp instinctively and racing towards him... The moment I started running there was a vicious crack above the junction, with thunderous rollings and boomings coming from above. The junction collapsed with a roar that shook the ground and gave me strength to run harder.

Hundreds of tons of hard grey rock crashed down on the place where the junction had been, mangling my snap-tin and dudley [thermos] into flat pieces of useless metal. Had I been still seated with my back to that prop I would have been crushed.”

*Squires, p. 47*

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, to proclaim the virtues of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

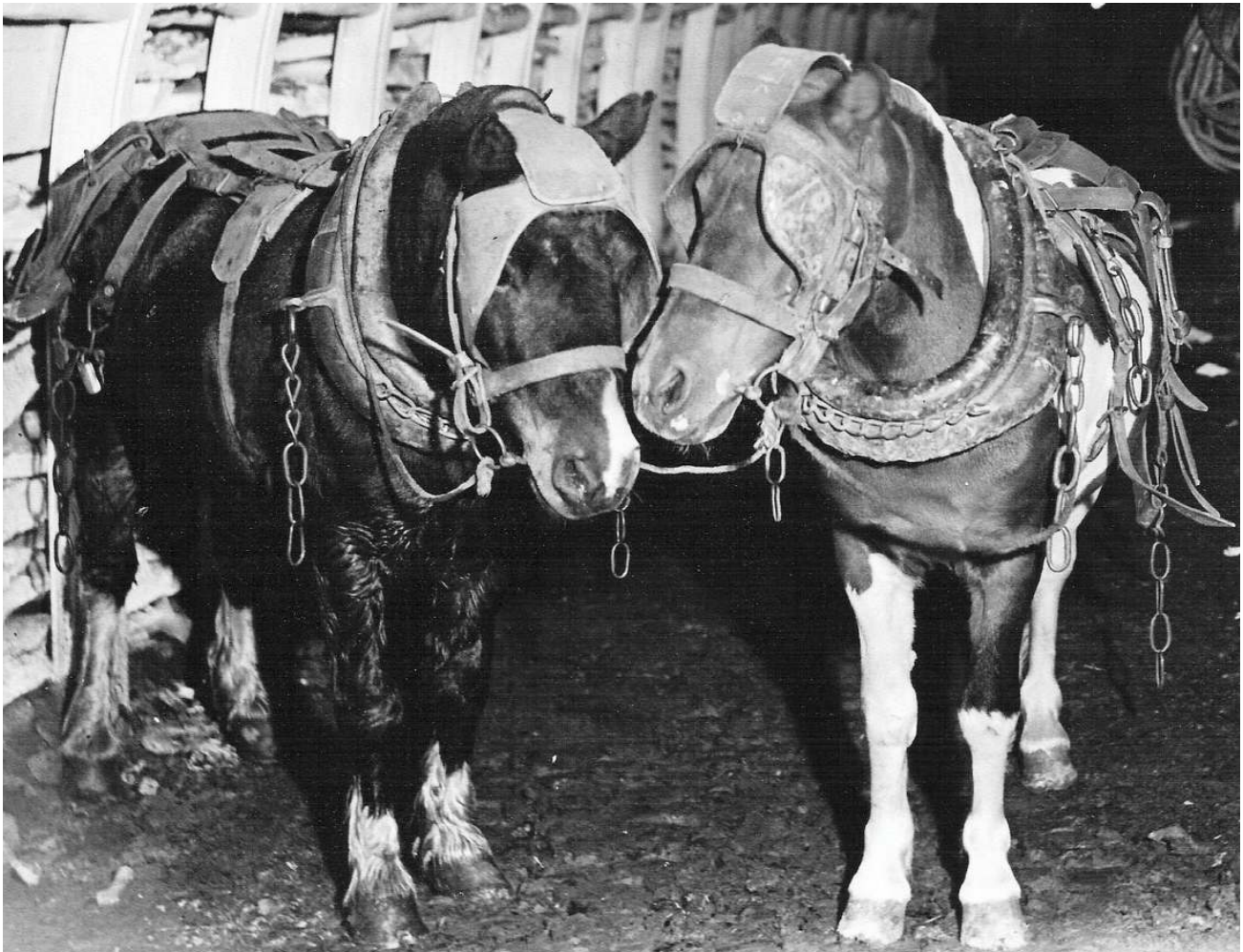
*1 Peter 2:9*

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

*Ephesians 5:8,9*

In Him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

*John 1:4,5*





# BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

## **Blue Letter Bible, [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org)**

This is my favorite online Bible study resource. You can quickly look up any verse and see the transliterated Hebrew or Greek for each word, along with the definitions, commentaries, and much more.

## **Bible Hub, [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com)**

This is a close second. When I want original definitions or commentaries, I use Blue Letter Bible. When I want to read a chapter or compare verses in various translations, I use Bible Hub.

## **Berean Study Bible, [bereanbible.com](http://bereanbible.com)**

I've been reading this translation lately, and it's the version used for most of the verses in this devotional. The BSB version is the only one in print at this time, but several other translations are available on their website in various translation tiers—interlinear, literal, and emphasized.

## **Grace To You, [gty.org](http://gty.org)**

You can listen to any of John MacArthur's sermons on the GTY website. It's searchable by topic and Scripture. He also has a daily podcast.

## **Precepts Bible Studies, [precept.org](http://precept.org)**

I'm so thankful to Kay Arthur and her Precept Bible studies. When I begged the pastor of the church I attended as a new Christian to have a Bible study, he refused. Strange behavior for a pastor, I know. But God led me to another church that had a *Precept Upon Precept* study on the book of James. I didn't just learn about James, I learned how to study any book of the Bible. That's been decades ago. I don't know if the studies are still of the same quality. Back then, it wasn't a lightweight approach. The studies required a fair amount of time.

## **Warren Wiersbe Commentary Set**

I devoured commentaries for about fifteen years as I had gotten a late start on my Christian walk. Recently, I bought this six-volume set by Wiersbe that covers the entire Bible. It's a handy reference without being overwhelming. Wiersbe provides a good balance of stories along with some deeper analysis. It's not overly academic by any means.

## **30 Days to Understanding the Bible, Max Anders**

This title sounds presumptuous. No one can fully understand the Bible in just thirty days, but I loved this book as a new Christian. I didn't understand how the Bible fit together as a whole. This book cleared up a lot of that confusion.

## **Living Waters, Ray Comfort, [livingwaters.com](http://livingwaters.com)**

If you want encouragement for witnessing or resources to use, this site has plenty to offer—videos, books, and tracts.

## **Big Picture Story Bible, [bigpicturestorybible.com](http://bigpicturestorybible.com)**

In case you're looking for a children's story Bible, I like this one. A problem with many children's Bibles is that the stories seem disconnected. This one presents "the big picture," showing how everything in the Bible connects and leads to the coming of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

# CHAPTER NOTES AND CREDITS

Lisa, Kristy, and Julie are my daughters mentioned in the devotions and these credits. Julie's horse, Kody, is the horse Scamper in my Sonrise Stable series is patterned after.

## Chapter 1

John Lyons no longer has a website. This is his son Josh's site—[joshlyons.com](http://joshlyons.com).

Lew Sterrett—[sermononthemount.org](http://sermononthemount.org)

Years later, I spoke with Lew Sterrett and asked him what had happened to Jessie. They discovered the horse had a back issue that caused pain when anyone tried to get on her. Thankfully, I've forgotten what he said happened to Jessie. It was probably not a happily-ever-after ending for the mare.

Photos (l to r): p. 4—Kody (Scamper), Kezzie, Sassy, Nikki; p. 5—Sassy, Nikki, Sassy, Kody

## Chapter 2

Photos: Cricket and Dolly. Unfortunately, those are the only two photos I have of my first ponies. The second shows my show outfit from the Steffens family. Those were the days!

## Chapter 3

The woman who dangled Julie's jacket in front of me was Sissy Burggraf, founder of Lost Acres Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation. She and I have been friends since that day.

## Chapter 4

If you've never heard of the *5 Love Languages* or aren't sure what yours are, you can take a quiz on the author's website. [5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-language](http://5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-language)

Photo p. 11—Maggie. I wish I had gotten photos of the day I brought her home, but I didn't.

p.12-Maggie, years later with my daughter and some of our Christian Cowgirls.

## Chapter 5

Illustrations from *Rosie and Scamper*, Jet and Rosie, Kezzie and Scamper, p. 16—Ebony with Christian Cowgirls

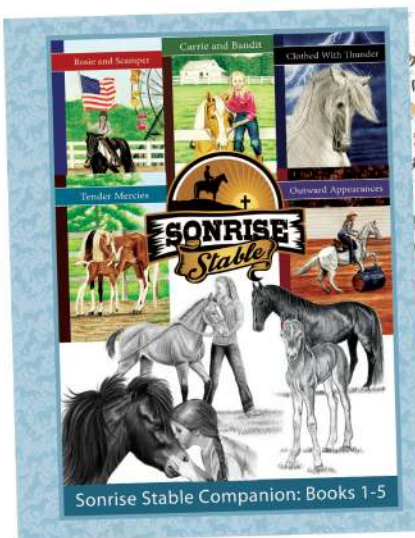
## Chapter 6

*Pit Ponies* by John Bright, Batsford Books, 1986

*Pit Pony Heroes* by Eric Squires, David & Charles, 1974

# SONRISE STABLE

Wholesome and horsey with strong Christian themes, the Sonrise Stable series is unique among modern children's literature.



Read the books alone or use the Companion Guides for additional activities to supplement the series.



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# HISTORY ON HORSEBACK

Through their bond with humans,  
horses shaped history in ways no machine ever could.  
Their contribution was absent from history textbooks—until  
History on Horseback!

## Learn history the fun way - on horseback!

The work of a gold prospector involved scooping up a panful of dirt, then swirling it around to separate the valuable from the ordinary. It was a slow process, but occasionally he was rewarded with a glittery nugget of gold. If one site didn't produce results, the prospector moved on to the next, hoping it would prove more profitable. The life of a prospector was challenging, but finding those gold nuggets made it worthwhile.

History research is surprisingly similar to prospecting. Rather than digging in the dirt, it involves digging into history. Just as a prospector's adrenaline must have flowed when he caught sight of a few flecks of gold, I grew more excited with each horse story I discovered. I didn't get my hands dirty working with pans of dirt, but I certainly sifted through tons of information in search of a few "gold nuggets."

What's a History on Horseback "gold nugget?"

Prunes is one example. Of all the thousands of burros used by gold prospectors, Prunes is one of the few whose story remains. He was the partner and constant companion of Rupert M. Sherwood, a Colorado gold prospector.

The trusty burro cheerfully carried Rupert's gold pan, shovel, frying pan, coffee pot, pick, rope, blankets, flour, bacon, sugar, and oats. When Sherwood was too busy to make the trip into town, the miner pinned a shopping list to Prunes' pack, and the burro headed off on his own. When he arrived in town, the shopkeeper filled the order and sent Prunes back up the trail to Sherwood's mining camp.

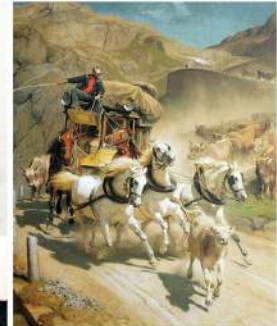
Read History on Horseback to discover more gold nuggets.

Perhaps you'll be inspired to become a history prospector yourself!



HISTORY ON HORSEBACK 1493-1866

Vicki Watson



## HISTORY ON HORSEBACK The Early Years: 1493 to 1866

Use it as a homeschool textbook or just read it for pleasure. *The Early Years* is the first in the HOH three-volume set.



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## Pit Ponies at Work

A pit pony driver's day began early. He would rise before sunrise, eat a quick breakfast, then set off for the mine in order to have his pony ready when the miners arrived. Former driver, Tony Blakes, recalled one of his ponies.

*I used to have a pony called Tid. He was a great pony to drive. I used to give him a nice brush down before we left the stable before I fitted his collar and mule. Then the next job*

*was his nose bag for snags [lunch] time. He would get a mint or spangle [a boiled candy] just before we set off on our way. I used to whistle on my way up to his stall and he knew it was me. It was a sad time when I had to give him up when I went coal face training.*

After grooming his pony, the driver would harness him, in some places called "gearing up." The mining harness was similar to a regular horse har-



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