

The Case of the Lazy Horse with the Bad Attitude

By Shiloh the Quarter Horse (with Lynn Acton)

“She’s not lame; she’s just lazy,” said the vet. He was wrong. I wasn’t limping because all 4 legs hurt.

My mom stuck up for me. “She doesn’t seem lazy to me. I think she’s hurting.”

“I think she’s got your number,” said the vet. I don’t know what that means, but Mom didn’t like it.

Soon after that the farrier put shoes on me because he and Mom thought maybe my feet hurt. They were right. Once the shoes were on my feet felt so much better it was actually fun to trot and canter in the pasture. But getting the shoes put on hurt so bad I couldn’t hold still. Every time the hammer hit my foot, pain shot up my leg and I jumped. After that, Mom gave me a shot to make me woozy when the farrier came. I think she put something in my food those days, too, because it tasted funny.

The shoes didn’t fix my whole problem, though. My hind legs got so stiff my feet dragged, and the farrier said I was wearing off my toes from the top. I couldn’t even pick up my hind feet to have my hooves cleaned.

The next vet said I was stiff because of my big bunchy Quarter Horse muscles. The vet after that said I was uncoordinated, and Mom should do exercises to help me learn where my feet were. Like I didn’t know. But she led me over a some poles, till we got to one where I had to pick my feet up. My front feet did OK, but I had to stop and lift each hind leg very slowly and carefully because it hurt so much to bend my hind legs. Mom waited for me, then she put her arms around my neck and talked a lot in a soft, sad voice. The last lady I lived with did that right before a strange man came with a trailer and took me away, so I figured I’d be leaving soon.

The first couple years of my life I lived a lot of different places. First, a man took me in a trailer from where I was born. He yelled a lot. Then another man took me away in a trailer to another new place. He put me in a pen and chased me around till I was really tired, then he put a saddle and bridle on me. The saddle pinched my shoulders even before he got on, and the bit hurt my mouth when he yanked on the reins. He kept kicking me, but I didn’t know what he wanted me to do, so I jumped around till he got off. After that, every time he came near me with the saddle, I swung my butt at him. When he pulled up the cinch I held my breath so he couldn’t make it too tight, and I waved my head in the air to get away from the bridle.

One day a nice lady came, and he told her I was all trained. He put me in a trailer and took me to her barn. Life was good for a while. She

didn't try to ride me very often, and I don't think she knew what to do any more than I did, so I'd just stand still till she got off. Then one day she cried over me, gave my leadline to a nice man, and I never saw her again. The nice man took me to his barn for a while, and then he took me to my mom's place.

Mom is different from the other people I'd known. She acts like a boss mare. She taught me her rules and made me follow them. She taught me about being ridden, too. I think she guessed that the whole thing scared me, the saddle, the bit, and having someone on my back. She was patient and reassuring, and helped me understand what to do. I never got in trouble for making mistakes, only for pinning my ears and swinging my butt at her. Even though my body was hurting more and more, I started to trust her and feel safe, like wow someone will actually take care of me. I wanted to stay here. Then, when I couldn't do the pole game, she hugged me and got all sad like the other lady, and I started listening for the trailer to take me away.

But it never came. Instead, there was *another* vet. This one didn't just look at me; she felt me all over, and noticed how I flinched when she touched me. Then she did some weird things like spinning me in a circle, and pulling my tail, which made me lose my balance. She told Mom that every muscle in my body hurt (true!), and I knew perfectly well where my feet were (of course!); it just hurt to move them (that's why I tried not to!). She said my problem was a mystery, but she would try to solve the mystery.

The vet stuck a needle in me and sucked out lots of blood to test me for all the things that could make my muscles sore. She decided I probably had Lyme Disease. I had to take medicine called doxy-something. It tastes awful, no way was I eating that from the tube, but Dad mixed it with goodies in my food. At first the medicine made me feel worse, but after a couple weeks, I felt so much better I was galloping and bucking in the pasture. Mom and Dad were so happy for me they were laughing.

I needed a lot of medicine that year, and I still need more medicine about once a year when I have a relapse. The vet said my joints will always be stiff because I was sick for so long, but I'm not as stiff as I used to be, and my muscles don't hurt like they did. I admit I still pin my ears when someone puts a saddle on me; I can't help worrying that it's going to hurt. But once the girth's done up, I'm ready to go, especially if it's a trail ride in the woods!

I wish I could have thought of some way to tell Mom that I was scared and hurting without misbehaving and being grumpy. But most of all I wish all horses could have people who understand when they're scared, and take care of them when they hurt.