

# Twice we bought a horse for free

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One time the horse was a 16-year-old half-Arab mare. She came with a 20-something companion. We had to take both for the same money.

Living in rural Ohio, we'd heard about these two mares being offered "free to a good home" from a friend of a friend. My 12-year-old daughter, Amy, had just joined a 4-H club with a horse emphasis, so we were in the market for a well-broken horse.

My friend Marilyn came with me to view the horses and brought her empty stock trailer.

We pulled into a well-manicured rural home with some acreage and a pond. There was a little horse barn just cozy enough for two well-matched sorrels.

The older mare, Princess, had a little more size as a quarter horse/American Standard Bred cross, while the younger, Arab/quarter horse cross had finer features.

The couple explained that their daughter had used the younger mare in 4-H. No one was using the horses, and the parents wanted to find a nice home for the mares.

The owners brought both mares out

of the barn. As the husband saddled the Arab mare, he explained that she didn't like a tight cinch.

Well, none of us particularly does, and I'm not just talking horses here.

"So," the husband continued, "ride her with a loose cinch."

He swung up on her without using the stirrup and landed lightly in the middle of the saddle; I could see the cinch hanging loose, inches below the mare's belly.

He walked her slowly, ever so slowly, across the grass for a few steps.

"And when she's tired," he continued, "she lays down, so take her back to the barn."

I looked at Marilyn. "What do you think?" I asked quietly. With a conciseness not restricted to Vermonters and witty worthy of a Westerner, she replied, "Price is right."

We loaded the mares and took them home. At home, we saddled the Arab



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with the cinch tight for Amy to try.

She was 12; this was her horse: She wanted to ride.

Amy was only going to walk the mare, Deon, around the yard; the mare had been nothing but calm

and quiet in every respect. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, as Amy and the mare reached the edge of the yard, the mare lay down. Amy stepped off the mare and stood over Deon's sprawling, languishing body, every ounce of Amy's being expressing, "What the heck kind of a horse is this?"

When we were told the mare lay down when she was tired, we never expected it to be after two minutes!

I did know how to react when a horse lay down under the saddle. I got on Deon. Charlie, my son, led out on Princess, up the West Virginia-type hillside behind our rural Ohio farmhouse.

At the crest of the hill, Deon lay

down. I stepped off on my right foot as she went down and planted the left toe of my well-worn, pointed, Western-style cowboy boot in the mare's left side several times before she could get all four feet under her again.

I believe I gave her a piece of my mind at the same time, because this memory always includes the vision of my son's head swiveling in my direction with wide eyes and a shocked expression on his face.

The mare never attempted to lie down under the saddle again. It was as if she said to herself, "Oh, well. It was a good run while it lasted."

She slipped into the 4-H routine as the old pro she was. Amy and Deon were a great pair.

The other horse we got for free was a neglected, adopted wild mustang from Nevada. But that's another story.

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*Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.*