

# A Year of “Bouncing Back”



By Ruth Rose

Riding has always been a huge pleasure for me. I love the smells, sounds and feel of being in the barn, on the trail, and in the pasture with my four-legged family. This year, however, I found the true meaning in the depth of my passion and need for horses. Both of my parents died instantly in an automobile accident last August, and suddenly, the people and horses in my life became more precious each day. I realized that they could be gone -- just like that -- as quickly as a blink.

Traditionally, my parents came to my place every spring, to spend at least two weeks helping paint jumps and groom paths on my way to a dream of *Wanna-Be Eventer*. But after the accident, it was time to live up to the ambition and make the dream a reality. Taking up Eventing as an adult adds a set of challenges that are unique. Neither the mind nor body has quite the flexibility they did in years past! But one thing is certain, when you need time to heal and think, physical activity spaced with intense mental concentration can be your best friend. And so, my horse, Ben, was put into an extensive conditioning program over the winter. Since he had spent the previous year in rehab from a ligament injury, every sound step he took made me smile.

Buffed, puffed, and shiny 'On Deck,' I looked into that lovely dressage ring and thought how grateful I was to be able to ride Ben, how lucky I was to be alive, well and strong on such a beautiful day, and how much I wished my parents could be there to see my very first ride. Dressage test completed, I halted, saluted, and felt as much happiness -- and sadness -- as I've ever felt in my life.



*Mom & Dad*

A thunderstorm began brewing as we headed to the show jumping phase, where we had a clear round. But just as the next phase, cross country (x-c), was to begin, the storm broke and it began pouring rain, with lightning, resulting in a hold on course. We went back to the barn. I figured this was just an echo of my last nine months, filled with intense ups and downs, happiness and disappointment. Then, like a miracle, the hold was called off and the judges arrived JUST as it started to POUR again. They looked at my worried, expectant face, and sent us off with the traditional "5,4,3,2,1 -- GO! Have a great ride!" I felt badly for the drenched and freezing jump judges huddling along the way. We completed our course, dripping and grinning from ear to ear! Ben was bouncing with excitement, looking for another jump, and we could hear our friends' distant cheering from the barn overhang. I thought about how much this meant to me and how much it had helped me to heal.

Next, we entered a 'real' show' -- and 'off we went' to Hidden Hollow. We walked the BN x-c course at least six times, planning each jump as if we were riding Rolex. In dressage, my heart skipped a beat mid-test as I felt Ben stumble, but he kept trotting

sound and I began to breathe. After our salute, laughing friends told me what had happened -- a butterfly had landed directly on Ben's nose and he'd flicked it off with his front hoof! Aft competition's end-- the biggest surprise of all -- we were in the ribbons! While I understood this was just about healing and fun, I was very proud that we'd placed and I had a ribbon to take home to Ben's Daddy.

My friend Chris had loftier goals. She was qualified for the American Evening Championships (AEC) at Lamplight and decided on our drive home that it'd be in her best interest to go to Wayne Horse trial held at Lamplight Equestrian Center to get acclimated, so we entered the show and *off we went!*

It is intimidating to drive into the fabulously groomed, State of the Art Lamplight facility. I thought about my parents more that trip than on any other, but in a more peaceful and quiet way of wonderful memories and happy times. At the end of Dressage, Ben had scored his lowest yet (low is GOOD in eventing) -- we were tied for third. After Cross Country... still tied for third. After a double clear show jumping round, Ben moved up to second -- and we were now eligible for AECs! I had no intention of going as a competitor, just as Chris' groom, but was thrilled by the fact that we'd qualified. Half way home, my husband called to say he'd taken the week off to be our 'groom,' with the comment, "It's better to ask forgiveness than permission." Chris, Boo, Ben, and I entered AECs!

If you think Lamplight's intimidating in itself, try being a Beginner Novice Competitor starting her THIRD horse trial EVER -- being three barn rows down from Leslie Law (Individual Olympic Gold Medalist) and other famous riders! The noise, sheer volume of horses and people, and the level of activity were astounding! It was intensely exciting. This was my second time to attend AECs, and there's a whole different feeling being a competitor rather than a spectator!

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We completed all three phases of the American Eventing Championships with pride. We jumped our very first ditch, and a combination two-stride on X-C, and actually cantered through the water! After show jumping in the glorious sunrise the next morning, I felt as proud of both of us as if we'd just won a gold medal at the Olympics! In fact, I thought about the Olympic Creed as we were exiting the arena to the hugs, cheers, and congratulations of my family and friends.

“The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.”

In a year of ‘bouncing back’, I’ve learned you can go very far, very fast when you’re carried on strong and brave friends’ backs -- whether four-legged or two -- both physically and emotionally.

Special thanks to Gentle Benjamin Rossini, “Ben,” who lifted me high, upon his strong back, and carried me triumphantly through a year that could have been very sad, but turned out to be the most appreciated year of my life.

If you ever get the chance, don’t waste it. Just be grateful and --

“5,4,3,2,1 -- GO!!! HAVE A GREAT RIDE!”

