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I will be pasted to the seat of my chair in front of my computer for the next couple of months. I signed on to produce a book titled, “Everything I Need to Know About Life, I Learned From My Horse.”

I assured the publisher’s rep that I’m no horse expert, merely a horse enthusiast. “We don’t care,” she said, “just write something funny about your horse experiences.” Since most of my experiences have verged on the bizarre, that’s not going to be a problem.

Take the day I “helped” wrangle dudes on a guest ranch. That experience provided me with social skills I didn’t know I had...like keeping my mouth shut except for a silly smile pasted on my kisser.

There was the guest who claimed he’d ridden “a lot,” which turned out to be five rides on a rented horse at an indoor arena. He wanted a “spirited” steed. This dude was a Tall Drink of Water with legs reaching approximately to his ears. I saddled up Big Ben, a roan 17 hands tall and equally as old. Big Ben never lost a rider. Mr. Tall Drink took on a John Wayne swagger. I encouraged him to ride around in the corral till I finished helping the other guests mount up.

A glamour-bedecked little woman was next, outfitted in brand-new everything. Her boots had heels so high she walked tippy-toed. A pristine Stetson perched atop her hairdo, which appeared to be shellacked. She wore painted-on designer jeans. I assigned her to Mollie, a bombproof little black mare. In a race with a snail, Mollie would lose.

The next would-be cowpoke was anorexia challenged. His initials were B.B., so naturally

Wrangling Dudes

Extra rations. By Gwen Petersen.

all the hands referred to him as Big Bubba. B.B. ran his mouth faster than anyone could possibly listen. He had more opinions than a presidential candidate. The Head Wrangler referred to him as “the Dude From Hell” and gave me the privilege of taking him out on a ride. I assigned Boomer, a horse of half-Percheron, half-elephant ancestry to Big Bubba, thus making it B.B. on B.

Hoisting Bubba aboard Boomer required an assistant. In Henry the Eighth’s time, his minions used a block and tackle and winched big King Hank aboard. Not toting a handy block and tackle in my pocket, I hollered for Head Wrangler. While I held Boomer’s bridle, Head Wrangler placed a shoulder and a hand as a fulcrum under Bubba’s derriere and thigh, then shoved upward. I stepped to Boomer’s off side and yanked down Bubba’s right foot to meet the right stirrup.

Last to be put in a saddle was little Ferdinand-the-Fiend. Ferdie suffered from Advanced Dirty Deviltry—ADD. His parents declined to ride, probably just to get free of little Ferdie for a few hours. Knowing I would be chief nanny for the day, I gave Ferdie a bay gelding named Cannonball because nothing, not even a cannon blast, would upset him.

Once all the guests were aboard their steeds, Head Wrangler led out—the dudes

strung out behind him. I brought up the rear where I acted as designated retriever of anything a dude dropped—camera, cell phone, candy wrapper, his or her good sense. Tall Drink wanted to race. Ms. Glamour was convinced that her horse, Mollie, bucked when the mare kicked at a fly on her belly. I encouraged Bubba to relax, loosen the reins and let Boomer do the work.

Ferdie, on Cannonball, treated the horse like he treated his parents. He complained, he whined, he jabbed Cannonball in the ribs, slapped him on the shoulder, the rump, pulled his ears, jerked the reins. Ferdie was all over poor Cannonball like flies on scat. I did my best to monitor him, but I couldn’t keep an eye on the little weasel every moment.

For a long time, Cannonball patiently put up with Ferdie’s shenanigans. But even good old Cannonball had his limits. As the trail made a sharp turn through some dense thickets, I temporarily lost sight of Ferdie the Fiend. But I heard a voice—whining indignantly.

“Help me, somebody help me!”

Rounding the bend, I saw Cannonball halted under a low-hanging pine branch. Ferdie was pasted flat, held immobile by the branch, his spine arched back over the cantle, his head on the horse’s rump. Cannonball had all four feet planted, his head down, eyes half closed. He’d had it. This was the first peace he’d known during the entire ride and he did not intend to move. Ferdie had met his match.

That evening, I gave Cannonball an extra ration of grain. ■