

How I came to own an ornery pony

Anne Norman

The day we learned that we were moving to the country, we kids were horrified. Leave our beautiful home in Scarborough, our schools and all our friends to move to a 50-acre horse farm in Pickering? Definitely the end of civilized life as we knew it.

Bear in mind that Pickering wasn't even on the train line 23 years ago and to move that far east was to know the true meaning of the expression "out in the sticks."

It's not as if we didn't know the meaning of words like rural, rustic and picturesque, my mother had always boarded whatever horse she owned at a country stable. We enjoyed the great outdoors, we just didn't want to live in it all the time. We were kids, what did we know?

I'd had riding lessons from a tender age and was a fairly able rider. As was the custom, the offspring of the boarders hung around the stable while their parents were riding, and any other time they could as well.

The boarding stable of choice at that time was a western one in Rouge Hill and we helped out around the barn, grooming, walking horses and shovelling. We lived and breathed horses. Even the sound of flies buzzing lazily over the manure pile was inviting.

On sunny afternoons we would often lie out on old straw bales, chewing on fresh blades of grass and watching the fast-moving clouds that seemed, to us, to be so many horses galloping across the sky. When we couldn't actually be riding, this was almost as good.

Two residents of this stable were a brown goat and a malevolent pony. Goats are often kept close to horses on the understanding that, if some dreaded disease is stalking your equines, the goat will get it first. This is

based on the assumption that horses and goats have similar immune systems, as far as I could ever make out. It never worked particularly well.

The goats usually ended up being mascots and this goat, imaginatively named Billy, was skilled at lifting packages of cigarettes out of shirt pockets. He didn't smoke them, or even eat them, he would just chuckle to himself in that wonderful Satanic way that goats have, and chew the whole thing to shreds.

Billy's buddy and cohort in crime was called, with fabulous inventiveness, Pat. He was half Welsh pony and the other half was shrouded in mystery. The guesses we made, based

on his vile behaviour, can't really be printed in a newspaper. Let's just say that he seemed to possess an almost human sense of spite and he planned his practical jokes with some skill.

To have any fear of him was to be lost. His small, neat ears would fold flat against his skull, his head would pull up and to the side while his piggy eyes rolled horribly upward. Initiates to barn life would often be told, with studied casualness, to go and bring the pony in from a far field. More than one unfortunate came running back, empty-handed and white-faced, to see us holding each other up, weak with laughter.

I coveted this pony. Only by possessing him, I was convinced, could I bear the shock of moving somewhere that had no store of any description within three miles of home. My parents, probably going through some sort of premature senility, agreed to this purchase. Well, hindsight is a wonderful thing.


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Home may be an island

Joseph and Mary Brooks and their four children might soon be living on an island, but not by choice. They will if landowners around them get their way at the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The family lives near Limehouse, north of Milton, on a narrow piece of property, with their home at the back of a lot more than 600 feet from the road. Presently there is a two-acre, worked-out quarry abutting the road to the west of their property and a large quarry on the other side of Regional Road 43.

The 76-acre property surrounding them on three sides is owned by the heirs of William Cohoon, who originally severed the Brooks property from his land in 1952. During legal entanglements with the property due to a hydro corridor to the east, Mr. Cohoon's heirs attempted to list the land as a farm with local realtors.

Jacqueline Sanderson of Aurora, one of Mr. Cohoon's daughters and an heir along with her sister and two brothers, claimed that the realtors refused to take the listing.

They then decided to open the quarry operation. They cleared the legal tangle with Ontario Hydro and started the quarry application process in 1987, according to Mrs. Sanderson.

The strip mining is planned for material which can be used untreated in road construction. It will be mined to a depth of 10 feet, said Mrs. Sanderson, if the application is accepted. There will be no stone crushing so there will be little noise or dust created, she said.

Halton regional staff said in a report to the planning and public works committee Wednesday they oppose the quarry because "it is not in keeping with the intent of the Niagara Escarpment Plan." Councilors supported the staff position.

The subject lands are designated as an Escarpment Protection Area. There has been no activity in the existing pit for the past 15 years and it is overgrown with vegetation.

Other agencies and interested bodies are commenting on the proposal before final decisions are made by the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

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