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# The Mane Bit

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[www.harrogatehills.com](http://www.harrogatehills.com)

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## MY FIRST CAMP EXPERIENCE AT HARROGATE HILLS

*By: Rebecca Schweinberger*

I remember the first time I set foot on the farm, breathing in the sweet horse smell, nervous as can be and shaking from head to toe, full of excitement. The night before I could barely sleep with the anticipation of being around horses for a whole entire day! What more could a little girl want?



*Rebecca and Bijou – then*

As I entered through the lounge a bunch of people were sitting around chatting and laughing, having a great time. They greeted me with a huge smile and said, “welcome to Harrogate Hills”. The way they greeted me made me feel welcome, washing my nerves away. I always remembered when I was little that everyone was so friendly, willing to help you, even with the simplest things. Like helping me carry the saddle that, at the

time, seemed to be so difficult considering the saddle was about the same size as me!

I always looked forward to going to camp every single day, always learning something new and having teachers who loved what they were doing and enjoyed teaching it. I remember when I was little I thought it was the coolest thing when the helpers showed me a cool trick, from the way to brush the horse to get the coat extra glossy or an easier way to put on the bridle - which seemed to be impossible! These little things the staff did to help me made the biggest difference in my learning experience.



*Rebecca and Grandpa – now*

I always remember feeling confident because they always seemed to have something positive to say; such as when I was trying to learn rising trot for the first time, and no matter how hard I tried I was never close to having the “one two one two” rhythm. I would need all my strength to sit in the saddle holding on for dear life, while feeling like I was being shot into space! But...I never got discouraged because my teacher was always saying, “you almost have it, you’re so close!” when really I had a long way to go. As the days went by I remember the feeling and realizing I was doing a rising trot! That I was actually doing it, something that seemed so difficult that just came... so naturally.

Besides the great teachers and helpers that made my camp experience so superb, there is much to be said about the wonderful school horses. Horses must put up with little kids yelling, screaming, running around, yanking on the reins, flopping around on their backs like a pancake, the occasional tear and kids almost flying out of the saddle just from the slightest change of rhythm. In my opinion all of the school horses deserve a gold star. They rarely mind the mistakes you make while learning.

I was finally out on the track on my own for more than 10 seconds, really proud of myself and thinking WOW I’m on my own, then all of a sudden swoop I was flying into the center of the arena flailing my legs, cranking the horses head around, but no matter how hard I tried I could never get the horse to stay on the track. Eventually, over time I got used to the horses little tricks and was able to prevent the horse from leaving the track. This was when I was actually learning how to ride a horse.

I really appreciated that the school horses weren’t perfect. What are you going to learn if you own a horse that goes around the track and stops and steers with no issues? You aren’t! All the horses forgive you for simple mistakes but at the same time make it a challenge. This is what I believe is important to learn about riding horses; they’re not always going to be perfect. This is what riding at Harrogate Hills has shown me, you have to work at what you want!

My first years of camp were an awesome experience. I had so much fun! Everyday was a new adventure learning new things about the horse’s anatomy, basic stable management and proper care for your horse. I would really like to thank all the teachers and helpers who made my learning experience such a blast and for putting up with me when I was seven! **If you are looking for place to ride...Harrogate Hills is the place to go!!!**



*Rebecca back in her “camper” days*

### **CAN YOU MATCH THE HORSES TO THEIR LEGS?**

This is an e-mail contest! Write to [chestnuts@harrogatehills.com](mailto:chestnuts@harrogatehills.com), the pictures will be sent to you by return. The first person to correctly match all pictures will receive a Harrogate Hills t-shirt.

**BONUS:** All entrants will be put on a special e-mail list and will receive up-to-the-minute news regarding coming events at Harrogate Hills.

## THE INSIDE STORY

I recently sat down with the owner operator of Harrogate Hills, Patricia Gillis, to have a discussion about the Harrogate Hills Riding School.

Here is a transcript of that interview:

**MB** *First of all Pat, how did you decide to start the Harrogate Hills Riding School?*

**PG** I started out managing the University of Toronto Riding School back in 1982 and when word came down from “the powers that be” that it was going to be shut down, I convinced some loyal U. of T’rs to purchase the school horses with me and I promised I would find a place to start a business and that I would buy them back in one year. Such is the optimism of youth!

**MB** *Did you manage to keep the promise?*

**PG** Pretty much. I was able to get back all but one of the U of T schoolies. Only Buddy stayed with his new owner and my understanding is that that worked out very well for him. Heather is our last one now. She was only 4 when I bought her for the University of Toronto and she will be 28 this year.

**MB** *When did you first start a summer day camp?*

**PG** We started a camp at the U of T but were only able to enlarge the concept when we moved to the location in Gormley and actually started the Harrogate business.

**MB** *What concept was that?*

**PG** Well, we always believed that, given an opportunity, young people would want to know as much as possible about the animal they were so fond of. So, rather than producing a camp where the kids just came to ride and then went swimming or off to play tennis or do arts and crafts for example, we decided to try to create a camp where the kids kept their focus on the horses. It’s HORSES, HORSES, HORSES at Harrogate and we find that the kids just love it. We have had students who have gone on to study

veterinary medicine (successfully I might add), but even the kids who don’t take their interest to that level gain a lot of value from studying the horse. It is easier to develop great discipline and perseverance when you are working towards understanding something that really interests you. I think the mental practice of that carries on into other aspects of their lives.

That might be the reason that we have often had teachers and parents remark that a child’s marks improve in school after they have been exposed to the horses in that way.

You know, Winston Churchill is credited with saying, “There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.”

I think you could argue that is so for kids too.



**MB** *Your camp only takes 18 children per session. You used to take up to 30. Why did you scale back?*

**PG** The rumour that it is because I am getting OLD has some validity, but the truth is a few years back I decided to change the format in the hopes of giving the kids an even more in depth experience with the horses. So now all of the riding is done in the morning and the campers work with the same horse for the whole two weeks. The campers arrive at 8:30, groom and tack up their horses and ride until around 11:00 or 11:30. There are six kids in each group and unless it raining hard (in which case the schedule changes because we have to share the arena) each group can go to a different area of the farm to work. The beginners generally stay in the arena or the small ring,

the intermediates in the sand ring or grass rings and the advanced students spend time in the cross-country field.

**MB** *What do they work on?*

**PG** It depends on the level of the rider. The beginners work on developing their position and skills, the intermediates continue to work on their skills but begin some elementary training of the horse. The advanced students work to a large extent on developing the horse's abilities.



**MB** *Besides the riding in the morning, how does the day unfold?*

**PG** After the riding phase is completed the campers of all levels see to the needs of their horse. This means generally, bathing the horse, grooming him, oiling his feet and observing him for signs of wellness etc. The students, even the beginners, start to recognize how the horse should look/act and in doing so they develop an eye for noticing when there is something amiss. All good horsemanship starts with the ability to pay attention to the animal and put his needs first. They learn to check their horse's legs for heat or swelling and to recognize which bumps and lumps are legitimate parts of the equine leg. You have to look at a lot of horses but, over time, eventually you will notice when things are not right and we encourage the campers to develop that ability, to pay attention to the details.

Once the horses needs have been met the campers have their lunch. After lunch we work on some theoretical aspects of horsemanship. Some days we might work on minor veterinary ailments, another day on how to lunge a horse. It is almost always hands on and the campers are given a notebook in which they can keep records of what they have learned. Campers of all ages produce some excellent work. It is

amazing how seriously they take their writings and the knowledge that is shared between the campers and instructors.

**MB** *Is there a time when parents can come and see the progress their children have made?*

**PG** Yes, we have a "show" on the last day of each camp period. The campers seem to enjoy demonstrating their new skills as much as the parents enjoy watching.

**MB** *You seem to have had the same staff for many years.*

**PG** Absolutely! One of the reasons that the camp program runs smoothly is because we are very lucky to have a fabulous staff. For example Mary, the Camp Director, has been with us for over five years and Maggie, the Assistant Director, who will be starting her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of university this fall, started here as a rider and camper and has been working here since high school. Both instructors certainly know the farm and our priorities in terms of curriculum. The rest of the staff is made up of students who ride here during the year – their tireless enthusiasm inspires everyone! They know the horses, they know the routine and they make the camp experience fun and safe for all concerned.



**Harrogate Hills Intensive Riding Camp**

**Join us for our 22<sup>nd</sup> year.**

## HARLEY DAVIDSON AND HEATHER WOODS



On Friday January 5<sup>th</sup> Harrogate Hills lost one of our best and kindest school horses. We found him in the morning after apparently having had a very rough night with colic. The vet came immediately but the prognosis was poor and so the very sad, difficult decision was made and Harley was euthanized Friday morning.

Because he had been so well until then it was a shock for all concerned but especially distressing for his owner Heather Woods. Heather was kind enough to bring Harley to Harrogate a number of years ago with the very generous offer of letting us use him in the riding school. I had never met Heather before but I remember, after listening to her offer, I couldn't help but feel honoured that she would trust us with her dear little horse. When I recounted the offer to others who hadn't been there, their first inquiry was "What's the catch?" Now this is funny only because it is usually me that is so cynical, and yet there was something so open and honest about Heather in that first meeting that doubts about a "catch" never crossed my mind.

Harley went on to be a stellar school horse and Heather became a very good friend of the farm. Harley would patiently teach beginners and experienced riders alike and then meet with Heather once a

week where the two would have a chance to reconnect and re-polish the skills. This of course is part of what made him so special to ride for the rest of the students. His last public appearance was as Santa's special reindeer at the recent Christmas party. Many of you will also remember Heather and Harley "danced" for the crowd at the 20th Anniversary celebrations in October 2005. This was their gift to the riding school

Because Harley had suffered a tendon injury in June of last year, he was just starting to return to work in the school. Heather did all of the 'bringing back' work and I am glad that she had that time with him. She could go out to the field, stand at the gate and call him and he would run from the farthest corner to see her. Who wouldn't envy that kind of connection with a horse?



They say that horses leave a hoof print on your soul and Harley Davidson certainly left a mark on all of us here. I suspect the hoof print is especially deep on Heather's heart and we offer her our most sincere condolences for her loss.



## HORSE SHOW SCHEDULE

(Tentative dates)

Sunday, February 25, 2007  
 Sunday March 25, 2007  
 Sunday April 29, 2007  
 Sunday, May 20, 2007  
 Sunday June 20, 2007



*Don't expect to win every time . . . .*

## Sponsors of Harrogate Hills Horse Shows



## WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Every rider who enters a Harrogate Hills horse show has the chance to win one of the following:

- 1 year gift certificate for Horse Sport
- Harrogate Hills windbreaker
- 2 private lessons
- Movie passes
- Half chaps
- FREE entry to one division of the next horse show
- Horse lovers grab bag
- Extreme makeover – getting your horse ready for the next show.

## DR. VAN AREM

Keep an eye out for information regarding equine veterinarian Dr. van Arems next visit. The last time he came to Harrogate Hills many of us were amazed – and educated – by all we learned. Dr. van Arems has a lot of experience and he is able to explain it all in a way that is entertaining and understandable for all.

Times and dates will be posted in the lounge and at [www.horseloverschat.com](http://www.horseloverschat.com). Stay tuned!

## JOKERS CORNER!

What did the waiter say to the horse?

*I can't take your order. That's not my stable.*

Where do horses stay in a hotel?

*In the bridle suite.*

What animal has more hands than feet?

*Why, a horse, of course!*

How long should a horse's legs be?


*Long enough to reach the ground!*


What is the best type of story to tell a runaway horse?


*A tale of WHOA!*


## VERY MANY THANKS


To **Rob Hooper** (father of Jen Hooper) for


 Sliding doors that open at the touch of a finger – rather than having to push your whole body against them


 The wood paneling in the Tack Room which not only looks great but also blocks much of the cold air from the barn


 Moving the laundry tub from the Lounge area to the bottom of the barn making it easier to empty water buckets – Vuokko and Robyn both love this new feature!


 Making the stall doors in the top aisle open smoothly.


 Fixing the wheel on the big wheelbarrow


 Making new saddle holders for the tack room – no more saddles on the floor!


 Designing and installing a new door to the big field from the “outside” stalls

 Fixing the stall lights in the top aisle

 Closing the hayloft doors for the first time in about six years!

 Fixing the leak in Pat’s roof as well as the downspout outside the Lounge

 Fixing the ankle-breaking holes in the barn

 And finally, thanks to Rob for taking **SOME** of the pressure off Joan so she can continue to do the day to day maintenance, thereby ensuring there is something left of the barn for Rob to fix!

## THANKS ALSO



To **Ross Benns** (father of Sam) who has been known to harrow the arena with his ATV until it looks too good to walk on!



## TAX REBATE?

It is our understanding that when paying for riding lessons – or camp – may qualify you for the tax rebate to prevent childhood obesity. Check it out!



A background image showing a person in silhouette interacting with a dark horse in an outdoor setting.

**Harrogate Hills  
Riding School**  
905-473-3847

18786 McCowan Rd. Mount Albert  
[www.harrogatehills.com](http://www.harrogatehills.com)

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**JULY/AUGUST**

