

I Remember a Day

By
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I remember a day, really not so long ago, when my friends and I would mount up to ride down to the local store. Some of us would have saddles and some would not. Some of us would be wearing boots and some of us would be barefoot. We were a happy-go-lucky group of kids riding our trusty babysitters. Our folks never had to worry that other folks would be careless or our horses would harm us. With carefree smiles, we rode to the store.

We would mosey down the rode laughing and joking. Sometimes we would trot out a bit, but mostly it was easy going down the road. Our neighbors would wave and say hey to us. No one ever thought to try and spook our horses. It was not even a consideration. Once at the store, we wrapped a rein around whatever post was handy and went into the store. Honestly, we truly didn't need to worry, because those horses weren't going anywhere. We would pick our ice cream for the day and go back out. Now, you would have to know we weren't a greedy bunch. We loved our ice cream on those hot summer days, but we always shared with our horses. And believe me; they appreciated it as much as we did. After our moments of bliss savoring our ice creams, we usually headed for the nearest pond. No, not on public land, but on a neighbor's piece that didn't mind us kids going for a dip with our horses. There was no worry about who might sue another and there was no question that we were respectful. It was just that way.

Now, let's fast-forward a little more than 30 years. We are losing farmland at an alarming rate. Pockets of housing communities are replacing what once had crops growing on that fragmented piece of property. Those moving in are not country folk who once lived there. They are people moving from the city to the country to "get away from it all". Unfortunately, they aren't leaving the mentality behind in the city. They are bringing it with them. They are impatient and not cognizant of those they share the country life with. They won't back off to give you space for just a moment to get a handle on a horse who may be acting up. They pass by you so close that you and your horse feel the heat of their vehicle. They come up next to you and beep their horn, yell foul language at you, and possibly give your kid the single finger salute. Ah, to get away from it all.

As time has been going by, I have become a bit perturbed by this behavior. And I have reminded those nice folks who have barely squeaked past me, that if my horse happens to go through their windshield that they too will die. You see, an 850-pound animal becomes quite lethal to anyone in said vehicle. I also love it when you walk your horse over into the easement to allow vehicles to pass safely and the folks with the house nearby holler out they don't want hoof prints in "their" grass. That's when I pray my horse has to relieve himself at that moment. I figure they might appreciate the hoof prints after all.

The reason I am writing this article is not just to take you down Memory Lane, though it is a nice ride. It really is to talk to you about the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource. They are our partners in preserving land for equestrian usage. Kandee Haertel is tirelessly working to provide guidance, information and support in this arena. Many of the trails we loved are now multi-use trails. And those we share the trail with are less than enthusiastic about sharing. It seems like everyone is threatened by another's presence or takes everything as if it were personal attacks to be in the same area. Let's face it; some just don't play well with others. Areas are fragmented and ordinances are being drafted to leave us horse folks out. At one time, horsemen could mind their own business and we would stay out of trouble. That day is gone. And we do have to go to town council meetings and the like to make sure we will have a place to not only ride our horses, but keep our horses.

The Equestrian Land Conservation Resource is online and even has a store. You can get materials such as: Easement Guide for Equestrian Use, Equestrian Economic Impact Analysis: How Your Community Benefits, Getting Organized: Creating an Equestrian Trails Organization, Equestrian Land Protection Guide, In Their Shoes (11-minute video provides the basis for discussions leading to conflict resolution on multi-use trails), and Recreational Use Statutes and the Private Land Owner. These are handy guides that don't hurt anyone to read. Also, you can make donations to the ELCR. Any amount is useful and appreciated. In 2003, 81% of their revenues came from individual gifts and 86% of their expenses went to education, outreach, and program development. I would say that is pretty awesome.

Kandee sent a letter with the annual report and here are some of the highlights:

2003:

- ELCR was accepted as a participant on the Combined Federal Campaign
- Acquired a secure e-commerce for their website

2004 and beyond:

- The Lead Equestrian Partner Program successfully launched
- First session at the Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence, RI
- Pilot Program encouraging local land trusts to preserve land for equestrian use
- Success stories like Callethia Farm in MD and other private held land compiled and used to educate like minded people across the country
- Booklet on the importance of civic Comprehensive Plans for horse owners

Let's support and work together with the ELCR in preserving equestrian use land. I would like for my grandchildren to remember a wonderful day.

**Thank you Kandee Haertel and ELCR for your fine work!!!!