



POKER

In my sixth year of life, I lived on a farm with my parents and an uncle. I had no brothers or sisters, and my only friend was a boy who lived about a half mile away from our farm. I was envious of my friend because his parents had bought him a pony to ride. Because money was so scarce, my parents could not afford to buy me a pony. But, miracles do happen.

My miracle happened this way: My father and uncle, about once a month, would meet in the evenings with other farmer friends. They gathered to play poker. Sometimes, when the stakes became high, the winner might win an animal in lieu of actual money. At one of these gatherings my father ended up owning a pony that someone had put in the pot. Dad was pleased because now he could give his son the pony that he had been requesting.

The next day, Dad and I went in the horse and buggy to collect his winnings. Boy, was I delighted when I saw this very small animal and realized that it was mine. At that time we didn't know that our prize would be a problem. The problem was this: seventy-five years ago all farming was powered with horses. After the horses had been working in the fields during the day, they would be turned out in the pasture for the night. After getting the pony acquainted with his new environment, he began to display his true personality. He was mean and vicious. He had a uniform personality - always contrary! It required two people to hold him while a saddle was placed on his back. During the process he would kick, buck, or bite anyone within range. Riding him was impossible. He refused to move with my dad and uncle pulling his halter. For some unexplained reason, I could approach him without his throwing a tantrum. Perhaps my size, which in height was the same as his, did not intimidate him.

Things climaxed when he was free in the pasture with the other horses. The pasture was large, with numerous trees and a small stream. Before the pony arrived, the men would go to the pasture in the morning and place halters on the workhorses and then lead them to the barn to be harnessed for the day's work. However, when the pony came and was put in the pasture, he decided to modify this procedure. He changed these quiet and docile animals into wild mustangs. As soon as Dad or my Uncle would approach the horses, the pony would throw back his ears, bare his teeth, and charge the other horses, kicking and biting them on their legs. Naturally, they ran from this terror to all four corners of the pasture, leaving my dad and uncle visibly mad.

On one particular morning my father decided to use psychology, and since I could go to the pony with no problem, he figured I could distract the pony's attention while he concentrated on collecting the horses. He had just placed a halter on "Old Bill" and was holding the lead rope when the pony diagnosed the situation. The pony deserted me and went into immediate action, charging Old Bill with a ferocious look. Old Bill took a quick look and took off with Dad hanging on to the lead rope and taking the longest steps I'd ever seen anyone take. He must have stepped thirty feet from take-off to touchdown. The last I saw of Dad and Old Bill was their crossing the creek with water flying in all directions. When my father finally returned, his face was extremely red, and the air was blue with his utterances of four letter words I didn't understand. It had something to do with the Almighty and the pony being sired by a female dog. When his anger receded, I heard him tell my Uncle, "The next time I win at playing poker I'm sure going to examine the winnings more carefully."

Shortly after the above event, the pony was sold at a sale and the money received was used to purchase a docile pony which we named "Poker."

by Cletis Foley