

My horse is not imaginary anymore

Lifelong dreams sometimes only take forty years. That is when the idea of owning a horse which has played around in my mind for years finally came to the surface and said “you will become a horse owner”. I just wanted a horse I could ride on trails and enjoy each other company; and with patience, practice, and love one day I may become a horseman.

The reality came to me on a Saturday in July at approximately 12::30 in the afternoon. I was visiting the Calgary Stampede for the very first time. Growing up in Winnipeg I didn't have the opportunity to go to the Stampede but, having recently moved to a property just west of Edmonton, I thought it was my duty as a new Albertan to go.

I went to the Saddle Dome to watch the parade of breeds. Horses and riders came out one at a time and loped around the arena while the announcer commented on the horses' qualities. Then this horse entered the arena, unbelievably beautiful, mane flowing as dark as his body, noble in his posture. Even before the announcer spoke I thought this was the most majestic horse I have ever seen; then I heard the announcer say it was a Canadian – the National Horse of Canada. I have always been proud of my country, but seeing this horse glide across the arena increased my pride tenfold and I knew that a horse such as this had to be part of my life!

Returning home after the Stampede, I immediately started finding all the information I could about the magnificent breed. I have previously read many horse magazines but have never heard of this class of horse. As I researched books and the websites, many times I had stopped and thought that it was one thing researching the horse of my dreams, but another delving in to being a horse owner; which I knew little about, it's not like I grew up with them. This was going to be somewhat of an unsettling experience for me, I was concerned with reference to not being able to provide a proper environment for a horse. Having a horse is a big responsibility and I knew that quality of life for them could never be compromised; it's not like getting a turtle when you're eight and having your Mom look after it. When I told friends and co-workers about my decision, a few had thought that I was just going through a phase. This was not a phase, not a mid-life crisis; if it was then an exotic German sports car would be simpler and most likely cheaper than owning a horse.

After some back and forth phone conversations I arrived at Double Diamond Canadians in Brule, Alberta on a sunny March day; having had the fall and winter to research all I could about the Canadian and general care of horses. Dave and Lynda Flato spent about five hours with me showing the horses that were for sale, talking about the Canadian characteristics, and asking me questions about what I was looking for in a horse. It was the first time I had been in close company with the Canadian Horses. I was amazed how gentle they were; I had no apprehension with ten of the yearlings and their mares around me. They were all curious and just wanted to be close to me. There was one colt that stood out, this horse was unique I thought. He laid his head on me shoulder when I brushed him with my hand and was relatively content just being with me. Almost two years old, this dark bay Henryville Canadian won my heart as he followed closely behind me as I went around the enclosure meeting the other horses. It never before entered my mind I might want a horse that had not been broke yet. I was looking for a ready-

made horse, one that I could ride instantly and would do all I asked of it (yes, I was very green and a dreamer as well), but here stood before me this “new to this earth horse” however, not as new as I was to horses. Then a strong feeling came over me. I didn’t want a horse that was already broke, passive to my faults as a new rider. I wanted to experience every part of the horses learning, which would in turn help me to understand the makings of the horse, he would be a big part of my learning. After all, when would I have the chance again? I’m not getting any younger and I don’t have the space to have as many horses as I want. This will most likely be my first and my last horse, so I thought why not start at the beginning and make this a learning adventure for the both of us.

One more visit to Double Diamond two weeks later and the decision was made. Then after two of the longest months of my life passed, DDD Cromwell Phil (Soren is his barn name) arrived in to my life just eight days before his second birthday. Waiting for him to arrive that day was like waiting for Santa when I was five.

Some people with horse experience thought I was crazy; an inexperienced “green” horse owner and rider with a green horse. They thought that it would be too much for me and that I was doing the wrong thing. I believe these people had no idea of what a Canadian Horse has to offer this world and me for that matter. The first year with Soren has been an adventure. Let me tell you that there have been some trying times for both of us. My horse and I are learning as we go along. Those times have been eclipsed by the incredible joys that have filled my life in the last year and a half; Soren’s first time with saddle, easily accepting the bit and headstall, watching him play with his buddy Moses; his corral mate and brother from Double Diamond. But the greatest joy of them all is having Soren accept me, and want to be around me. I have seen many horse owners that have been around horses all their lives and have never felt that connection, but every Canadian Horse owner I have met is passionate about this breed and it shows. It’s amazing the people that come in to your life and help you out with the things you need and the questions you have, offering advice and helping in any way they can, I don’t know if that’s a “Canadian Connection” or just the way all horse people are. For all the people that told me I was making a mistake getting a horse, I have made many new friends with horses who have helped me greatly, supported what I have done, and pushed me to succeed.

Concerns of whether I was being a good horse owner or not all melted away when Soren’s Vet had come for his check up and shots. She had not seen him since the purchase exam a year ago. Dr. Fryer commented on how well he looked and behaved during his exam, and then she said words that were like music to my ears! She said she could see that he trusted me. I knew that deep in my heart but having someone that knows horses inside and out say it meant a lot.

Now, almost two years after Soren came in to my life I still think as I look out the window of the house and see him in the corral, or I take him for a walk down the road seeing the wonder in his eyes, or someone comments on his picture proudly sitting on my desk at work ... Dreams do come true. My horse is not imaginary anymore!

Kurt Nielsen,
Owned & Loved by a Canadian Horse