

Dear JW,

I really enjoyed checking in with you while we were in Marshall – it's great to hear your stories, and the more I know about horses, the more impressed I am! That one horse you rode who nosed the calves off the ground, then wouldn't let them stop moving til they were where he wanted them - that was amazing. I can't imagine Sunny even getting that close to a calf, much less pushing one around, but I know that horses meet expectations, whether very high (you!) or pretty low (me!). Anyhow.

There were a couple of things I didn't get to tell you about. First, the Loma Fire. It was several months ago now, but it was burning on top of the range of hills (maybe they'd qualify as mountains in Texas) between the Coast and the Valley – Mt Madonna is part of the range. I'm a member of the Equine Evacuation Team, and my team leader told me to meet her out at an Emergency Management Area that was set up close to the edge of the fire and wait to see if there was any evac needed – we can only go in if someone calls Animal Control and requests an evacuation and Animal Control says we can go. And Stephanie, a friend from the barn who is also an Evac volunteer, came with me as a "ride-along" to do map reading and general spotting.

We waited for a couple of hours and there were no calls for evacuation, so we were getting ready to leave when this guy drove up and told us that his friends had 4 Arabs in the fire zone that needed rescuing. He convinced the Animal Control guy, who is nominally in charge of the rescue operations, that (a) the horses needed evac, even though the owners hadn't called and (b) he should drive one of the rigs because he knew where we were going. So he hooked up to my team leader's trailer, she hopped in with him, and they took off with Steph and me following them.

The site that we left from was right at the bottom of Hwy 152 – the one that goes from Watsonville up and over to Gilroy. Kelley knows it – we go on it to get to the In 'n Out in Gilroy. Anyway, we drive it a lot and I've NEVER driven at that speed in a car, much less towing a trailer – that guy was flying. When we got to the top, we turned to go on a road that ran right along the ridge top. I had to stop and put the truck in 4WD about a half mile in – and we went another 7 miles.

The road was either straight up or straight down. A few times it was only one vehicle wide and there was a huge drop-off on one side – I could hear Steph sort of gasp, then say, "Looks good, Donna." Ha. It was *really* scary because the fire was close enough, on both sides of the road in some places, so that we could talk to the fire crews – we're talking about 25 yards away. And their vehicles were parked in wide spaces on the road - if we had met one of their groups coming out, I would have had to back my rig up and I don't know if I could have done it!

The further we went in, the scarier it got. There were a lot of downed power lines that we had to drive over, but they weren't *completely* down, that is, parts of them were a couple of feet above the road. I was worried that I'd catch one of them on the trailer fender or something and either bring down the pole or electrocute us! Then, the fire came across the road, so we started cutting through people's yards, then ducking back on the road when we could. Sheesh.

We finally got to the place where we were supposed to pick up the horses. I turned the rig around while some other people got the horses – but when they got to where the horses were, they discovered there weren't any halters or lead ropes, so they came back up and got all of Sunny's stuff and went back down again. The horses were Arabs, so the halters sort of fit, so that was good, but the horses weren't used to loading in trailers. Fortunately, I had a Costco bag of carrots (10 lbs) in the trailer tack room, so between the carrots and the hay in the mangers, they got lured in. (The people who owned them had left a couple of days earlier, so even though they had left hay out, the horses were probably pretty hungry.)

Just as we were closing the doors, a fire crew pulled up behind us and a guy got out of the lead truck and said, "Better hit the road, the fire's right behind us." So we did. We had to negotiate the same road we got in on, but with nervous horses in the trailer. Sheesh. That said, it always seems like the ride back isn't nearly as long as the ride to somewhere and that was generally true. There was one place where we came around a bend and one of the big fire rigs was parked right in the middle of the road. We came to a sudden stop and managed to tip toe around it, with some spotting by the fire fighters.

Anyhow, it all ended happily – we took the horses to the fairgrounds where they had food and stalls, and their owners could visit. That said, it was the sketchiest evac I've ever been involved with and we were pretty busy in 2008 and 2009!

I also wanted to tell you a story and get your opinion on it – so here goes. We had Christmas at my sister's house. Her late husband was a jockey and he had a son, Jay, who is still working at the race track as a trainer and comes to holiday affairs at my sister's. Jay is usually a really fun guy to be around: always pleasant, very funny, and helpful without getting in the way. My sister's son and his wife, Jim and Sabrina, also come to these events. They are also really nice, but very much non-horsey and very upscale San Francisco. So.

Jay and Sabrina and I are sitting in the living room chatting and Sabrina says, "I have a friend in Woodside who rides 'dressage' – can you explain to me what that is?" So I, who have never done it, launch into this thing about dressage being the foundation of most other horse activities and how good it is for their self-carriage and athleticism, etc – but I hardly got started when Jay interrupted me – which he *never* does – and said, "Dressage is torture for horses.

They are put into artificial poses that they'd never go into on their own. They hate it. You can see it from the way they hold their heads and the look in their eyes. It's torture."

I shut up at that point – Jay's spent a lot more time than I have around that kind of thing, but I have a friend, Jec Ballou, who writes books about equine fitness and dressage and wins national level dressage competitions, has attended the Spanish Riding School, etc. So I figured I could ask Jec. So I told her about the conversation. Imagine my surprise when she said, "He's probably right – dressage can be torture. People can get the horses into positions where they *look* right, but the underlying muscle isn't there and it can be incredibly painful." We went on to discuss how you use dressage to make your horse into a more effective mover, etc.

So now that you've heard my story, what do *you* think about dressage?

And I think I told you about your/our truck sort of exploding? If I didn't, the punch line of the story is that the truck did, in fact, self-destruct. However, I had the camper and the horse trailer with Sunny in it when it happened and it could have been really dangerous – it happened just before the last exit before Hwy 17 heads upward. But it didn't. I got off the freeway and coasted to a stop in a super market parking lot, under a nice tree, and sat for long enough to quit shaking before Wayne and the tow truck arrived. The truck showed great character in choosing it's time to blow up!

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1801. It is a very important document, as it contains the President's first message to the Congress.

2. The second part of the document is a letter from the President to the Congress, dated January 3, 1801. It is a very important document, as it contains the President's first message to the Congress.

3. The third part of the document is a letter from the President to the Congress, dated January 3, 1801. It is a very important document, as it contains the President's first message to the Congress.