

Where was I now? Let's see

By Constance Scrafield

A birthday ? and mine is today ? gives us pause for reflection, trotting up and down memory lane. Care to join me for a little while? Those of you who read this column know that I am fond of horses and that my old equine pal, Patrick, was a big part of my life for many years. We met in the U.K., where he lived in a stables beside Richmond Park on the west edge of London.

I rode him regularly for about a year and, when offered the opportunity, bought him and, subsequently, brought Patrick back to Canada with us.

One time, while still in the U.K., we were out with others in the park on a day when we were allowed to ride wherever we wished without being stuck with the bridle paths.

So, there we were, wherever we liked until we realized none of us knew where that was. We admitted it to each other: we were lost in Richmond Park but I was riding the answer.

?Take us back home,? I said to Patrick, loosening the reins to give him his head, and he did.

He knew the way. He led; they followed, all of us, sheepishly. Within 15 minutes, the familiar road came into view and we all had nothing but praise for Patrick.

On a certain Christmas Day, Patrick and I went out with the stables owner, Nick, for a ride. As we were returning to the stables, a thick fog had taken over the landscape, reducing the visibility to little more than the ground in front us.

Nick eased his horse into a canter and Patrick was delighted to join in. I called out with mild alarm and Nick said, ?Relax, Constance ? Patrick knows the way.?

Sure enough, we cantered through the fog like a dream and came to the gates out of the park as surely as if it were a sunny day.

There were plenty of sunny days in Canada, once we had settled here and established riding friends with whom to cruise and there was snow! Patrick had a nice winter blanket to go under the saddle for those cold days so that we joined the gangs that blasted through the snow, making it fly in all directions. This was deemed very entertaining to Patrick whose high stepping ways made the most of the display.

No restrictions here about where we could go, as long as private property was respected. So, there were long country roads, meadows and woodlands in which canter and dally, play as we pleased with Patricia on her beautiful pony, Windsor, always being sure of Patrick's instincts about getting us home.

As a young person, living in Clarkson, when it was still not so built up, there was a property down the road, owned by people who had a horse named Gypsy. They invited me to ride her any time and I was pretty pleased about that.

There was a day, when the old gentleman to whom Gypsy belonged saddled her up for me and said, ?Have a nice ride.?

Thrilled, I took her down Sunningdale Bend where we all lived, across the road to the school there, to ride around the field that was the play ground until..

At that point, Gypsy got the bit between her teeth, spun around on two heels, as it seemed, and bolted back ? across the road, heedless of any cars who screeched, blasting their horns ? ah, that was helpful ? dashed up Sunningdale Bend ? I wondered if I was going to die and how upset my mother would be ? to the bend ? and didn't make it.

Huh ? she put on the brakes rather than crash into the ditch, while, dipping her head, she placed me in that ditch with elegant grace.

I remember it well, flying over her head, landing without harm, as it happened, but I did let go of the reins. That suited Gypsy alright: she trotted off, knowing, for sure, how to get home.

Between Gypsy and Patrick, there was a horse named Arusha, owned by a local resident, Dorothy. We were in Tanzania, in Moshi, a village resting at the foot Mount Kilimanjaro. Soon becoming friends, Dorothy invited me to ride Arusha two or three times a week. Arusha loved to go; she knew everywhere and everyone. She was happy to give me the tours of the neighbourhood of coffee plantations and Chukka villages. They greeted us with cheers and greetings.

The twin peaks of Kilimanjaro were always in sight. I blessed those days and reminded myself: ?Drink it all in ? this day only happens once!?

Here's to birthdays and remembering that every day only happens once. Cheers!