



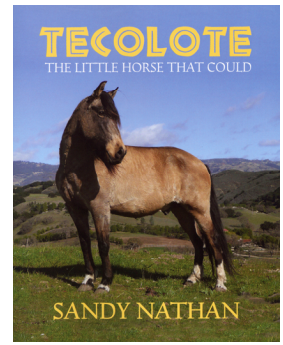
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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AUTHOR OF

TECOLOTE: THE LITTLE HORSE THAT COULD



I've loved horses all of my life. I've ridden them for more than half a century.

My mom said that I used to cry on Christmas and my birthday because I didn't get a horse. We lived in San Francisco; a horse was impossible. But things change. My family moved down the San Francisco Peninsula. When I was ten, I got to take riding lessons. When I was thirteen, the miracle happened: My parents bought me a horse. A plain horse, not Black Beauty or Secretariat.

My life changed immediately. As a kid, I was so shy that I barely spoke. That plain horse taught me that if I was not assertive, he would not leave the barnyard. I learned to assert myself, on horseback and off. That was my first major life lesson from the equine species. I rode pretty nearly every day from the time I was 13 to 18.

"You've really improved, Sandy," said one of the women at my stable. "When you first got here, you were so bad we thought you'd get hurt."

Improve I did. I've got this thing inside me where I gravitate to the hardest activity possible--because that's where the biggest reward lies. I joined a drill team/parade unit, the San Mateo County Junior Sheriff's Posse. We burned up the local rodeos and parades.

And then the horse show bug hit. You had to be totally focused, totally "on" to show a horse. It was thrilling. After showing and not winning for a year (a character building experience), I began to ride with really good trainers. Their guidance and my hard work transformed me into a tough competitor. I placed in pretty near every class I entered. The height of that era was showing my new horse, a blazing maniac named Robin Rose, at the Junior Grand National at San Francisco's Cow Palace. I didn't win, but I didn't get bucked off, either. I learned the second transformative lesson of riding: If you can show a horse and win, you can do anything.

Horses have always had another aspect for me. When I began to ride out in the redwood covered hills of the Coastal Range, I began to have what I'd learn were "unitive experiences" when I was in graduate school in counseling. Riding through those green forests, motes of light piercing the dimness, I felt part of the woods around me. I felt one with them, and one with my horse and one with myself. My first mystical experiences occurred on horseback.

Life happens. A drunk driver killed my dad when I was eighteen. Our family's former life disappeared, horses with them. I entered a period of work, going to school, and raising kids. I earned master's degrees in economics and counseling and had several professional careers.

"If you're going to have a horse again, you'd better do it before you fall apart," an inner voice said when I turned forty. The biological clock was ticking. I got into Peruvian Pasos when a friend had an open house at her ranch. Pasos are known as the "smoothest riding horses in the world." I had never heard of them. As I rode around the arena at that open house, I vowed I would have one of those horses.

Ended up with twenty-two. My husband, a city boy, initially thought horses should be extinct. Until he got into Pasos. Paso-mania took over our entire family. We did the whole thing, breeding, birthing, raising, assisting in training, and showing our horses. Completely over the top, out of control addictive behavior. It was glorious.

We've operated our ranch, Rancho Vilasa, since the late 1980s. We're in retirement mode these days: down to six horses.

Horses have taught me most in the inner realm. I've always been timid. For me, life with horses has always been about overcoming fear. It works. Learn to be competent, or find yourself lying in the dirt.

The other area where horses have taught me is spiritual growth and enlightenment. Like everyone in the San Francisco Bay Area, I climbed onto the Human Potential Movement with both feet during the 1970s. This got me started on a meditation practice and in the counseling program where I eventually earned my MA. I studied religious and meditation experience—I'd been having both since those trail rides through the redwoods.

I showed horses for many years. I learned discipline, mastery of a form, sportsmanship. How to ride. Many things. The most important thing I learned was that the tension and focus required to successfully show can toss you into mind-blowing, near-enlightenment experience. This happened to me twice showing in national championships.

Explaining this requires an entire book, one I intend to begin writing soon.

I'll close by saying that I love horses. I've ridden them for more than half a century. I'm not ready to quit.