

## The Wind Beneath My Saddle Tracy Rusch

The picture, faded with age, is one of a toddler perched atop a stout gray horse, bundled in a winter coat, tiny gloves gripping the mane on the broad neck of her mount. The horse is still, one foot cocked, patiently supporting his unknowing student. We are alone in our picture, and forever ours is that moment. The gray horse belonged to my grandfather, an accomplished equestrian with nearly eight decades of equine experience and a reputation as a horseman that I could only dream of acquiring.

And I do dream! I realized quickly that equine companionship would become my life's true passion. My youth was spent working off lesson expenses, painting fences, rearranging jumps, mucking stalls, helping students prepare for lessons and shows. I still spend hours each week cleaning stalls, scrubbing buckets, and doting over my partner in crime, Leroy. He was given to me by the family of a close friend and father figure who passed away unexpectedly. Mike's father personally gifted me money to purchase Leroy from the estate. What a bittersweet beginning for us as a team, but also the beginning of a wonderful journey.

America's founding farmers and ranchers created local rodeos as social gatherings to unwind using the only resources available during those times. As our country developed, so did the sport of rodeo and barrel racing. Today the National Barrel Horse Association is the largest organization nationwide devoted to preserving and promoting this event. Although the equine industry was devastated by the failing economy several years ago, equestrian enthusiasm has flourished. People are interested in developing bonds with arguably the most integral animal involved in our country's development: the horse.

As an undergraduate research assistant I participated in studies focused specifically on the healing nature of the human-horse bond. I've competed as a member of the BGSU Intercollegiate Horse Show Association English equestrian team but am currently unable to due to financing. In my life long quest of everything equine, I have studied equine massage and chiropractic therapies, holistic and veterinary maintenance, animal psychology and behavior. I've worked as trainer's assistant, read stockpiles of books, attended events as competitor and spectator, and I've come to realize that horses offer humans the opportunity to develop depth of character in the most profound manner attainable.

My dreams of competing outside the local arena have yet to be realized, and this is one aspect I would like to focus on if awarded the Given's fellowship. To be competitive as an equestrian, one must strive to perfect each interaction with their teammate. Communication, presentation, trust, support, understanding, forgiveness, willingness to listen, learn and apply acquired knowledge are all essential. Before these skills can be effectively applied toward any team effort, individuals must apply these introspectively. How great our world would be if every person could focus on refining these skills!

I have identified three educational clinics, detailed within the budget, offered by barrel racing's most highly regarded educators that would be of immeasurable benefit to me not only as an equestrian, but as a student, professional, and societal contributor. These clinics would allow me to network with individuals I will otherwise have no access to. They would allow me to focus on new concepts in communication with my horse, which extends benefits far beyond the walls of any arena.

I have proven through years of hard work and dedication that I am committed to fostering deep, meaningful bonds with these sensitive animals, and Leroy has proven that he has the heart to turn out respectable times against some of the fastest horses in Ohio. We have grown together into a force to be reckoned with, locally. With the assistance of fellowship funds, I would like to participate in the ultimate non-traditional BGSU student experience, completing the entire tour of ten competitions for the Northwest Ohio NBHA district, the NBHA Ohio State competition, and the NBHA World Show, if qualified. I would like to end this tour by competing at the All-American Quarter Horse Congress, held each October in Columbus, Ohio. Congress is the largest breed-specific show in the country. These competitions would allow me to showcase the skills I will be focusing on in the educational clinics. Competing at this level would fulfill a dream that has been nearly thirty years in the making!

To actualize this dream would allow me to fully experience all that I have been training for over so many years. All of my hard work, years worth of falls, triumphs, setbacks and progress, along with countless dollars that have shaped me into the horsewoman that I am today, would become fully realized. Without fellowship funds, this dream shall remain out of reach.

As a horsewoman, I am ever aware that success cannot be claimed as mine alone, nor can the hardships that have been present along the way. The bond I share with horses has taught me empathy and humility, and has instilled in me a burning desire to give back to the community. Many events I attend are charity fundraising events, and often winnings are donated to specific causes. I will be donating 50% of any earnings won in competition to Vail Meadows, a local therapeutic riding facility serving individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. I will also start an online blog, posting summaries of all experiences, helpful tips I will be learning and inspirational thoughts for the whole equestrian community. My hope is to inspire others who share the desire to grow and learn in the equine experience.

Thank you immensely for considering this proposal. My dream is to share my passion, energy and this experience with everyone willing to better society for both horse and human. This desire is instilled in me by family tradition and American heritage and is strengthened by years of observing the powerful effect of equine companionship in healing human spirits. This profound fulfillment is unavailable within BGSU classroom walls, and unaffordable outside of this fellowship opportunity.

## BUDGET

Expense	Purpose of Expense	Amount
Veterinary Costs	Necessary paperwork for travel with livestock; outside usual veterinary costs associated with equine ownership. Usual costs (maintenance/health/upkeep) will be personally funded.	\$300.00
Association Memberships	\$50.00 NBHA & \$40.00 AQHA. Necessary for competition/eligibility; added discounts on travel costs and equipment expenses possible as membership benefits.	\$90.00
Educational Clinic Costs	May 3-4, Lynn McKenzie clinic Holland, MI \$375; May 9-11, Charmayne James/Kristie Peterson clinic Wilmington OH \$600; June 6-8, Sharon Camarillo clinic Swanton, OH \$550; opportunity to learn directly from leading professionals with multiple NFR championships, World NBHA championships, WPRA national championships, and many other renowned titles; invaluable networking experience otherwise unavailable.	\$1,525.00
Show Fees	Includes entry fees, stall fees, ground fees, office fees; for 10 NBHA District OH07 shows plus one entry at AQHA Congress; opportunity to apply, showcase and and share what I have learned from each of the clinics.	\$1,150.00
Food/Eating Expenses	Some clinics offer dinner events with clinicians for added networking opportunity; food will be prepared/packed as often as possible to avoid unhealthy convenience foods commonly offered on show grounds.	\$500.00
Lodging	Electric/camping (approximately \$60/event); some hotel accommodations necessary where camping is unavailable; camper/trailer/truck used will be family owned, insured and maintained with AAA roadside assistance coverage.	\$800.00
Rubber Floor Matting	Necessary for travel/stalling; greatly reduces risk of injury and fatigue/stress during extensive travel.	\$150.00
Shipping Boots	Necessary preventative measure for equine safety during extensive travel.	\$150.00
Fuel	Figured at 10 MPG (pulling) fuel economy at \$4.00/gallon over 2,350 miles of travel. When possible travel expenses will be split with other attendees to decrease expense. When this occurs, the unused funds may be added to miscellaneous expenses funds or possibly donated to charities promoting equine activism.	\$940.00
Miscellaneous	Equipment maintenance, extra travel expense, fuel, emergency; possible donation to charity if unused.	\$395.00
<b>Total Budget</b>		<b>\$6,000.00</b>

*Earnings from all Jackpot entry classes will be split 50/50 with 50% of the earnings going toward annual equine ownership expenses and 50% being donated to Vail Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center.*

*All equine ownership/responsibility expense outside of the Fellowship experience will be personally funded.*