

Mother's Short Essays or Stories

In the late fifties Mother wrote a number of short essays that are included here. “Who’s Crazy Over Horses” is the story of an adventure Mother had with a neighbor’s horse, Go-Go. “A Fable” is a thinly disguised complaint against Father. I think “Job” is an allegory about their troubled finances. “Miscellaneous Thoughts” are her reflection on the new role of womankind. “Pets Unlimited” is a reflection on the joys of being mother to a boy, and “Six Months of Saturdays” is about Father’s difficulty finding a job.

A Fable

Once upon a time there was A Prince Of A Fellow, and he took unto himself a wife. Now he loved His Chosen One dearly and wanted to go out and slay a dragon in the conventional manner, to prove to her the measure of his devotion.

“Tell me what I can do for Thee, Oh Thou Jewel among Women,” he said to her.

But she, being of a prosaic turn of mind, answered: “If you will but hang up thy clothes upon arising, it will please me greatly.”

But he (being a Prince of a Fellow) was greatly disappointed at the insignificance of this request. “Of course, My Love,” he said to her, “but can you not think of something else, something magnificent, which will shed glory upon the doer?”

She thought awhile and made this reply.

“My Lord,” she said, “The honor of being Your Chosen One brings with it many responsibilities and my days are filled with many tasks. If you could but bring yourself to view with patience and fore bearing my inadequacy and unworthiness, it would lighten my burden.”

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But he (being a Prince of a Fellow) after vowed to do so all the rest of his days, went off and fought a dragon, which promptly slew him. Leaving his Chosen One to mourn and bring up their children in his image.*

And the moral of this fable is this:

It is harder to do small things daily than to sacrifice your life once.

Who's Crazy over Horses?

Ever since we bought the house in the country, surrounded by acres of green grass, our youngest has been earnestly and consistently agitating for a horse. And just as earnestly and consistently I've been turning a deaf ear to the propaganda that appeared in various guises from time to time. Articles and books about horses, pictures of horses, statues of horses, even the plea that: "But, Mother, I'm old enough to take care of a horse," has been met with stony resistance.

All my life I've loved animals, whether furred, scaled or feathered. With the proper inducement I've even worked up a sort of affection for the occasional worm or caterpillar that unwillingly found himself a temporary member of the family. But I draw the line at horses. Anything bigger than a Saint Bernard I view with alarm. To put it bluntly, horses scare me to death.

All else failing, she tried a new approach. Heavily leaning on my well known love and tolerance for anything alive, came the argument that I would surely love a horse if I came to know him. Ah, but I do.

There was Go-Go (honest, that was his name). Go-Go and I were neighbors for years. My kitchen window overlooked his pasture, and I had only to appear at the sink, dreamily sudsing the breakfast dishes, or scrape carrots for supper, when with a wild rush and a whiney, there was Go-Go, tossing his mane at me. I never could quite figure out if his whinnying was an invitation to a romp, a bid for the carrots, or just a plain horse laugh.

Being a grown woman and the mother of four, it would never do to damage my image by showing fear, so, telling myself sternly that 'a horse is a horse is a horse', I bravely set out to overcome this Horse-o-phobia. Carrots, apples, grass clippings were tentatively offered and avidly snatched. Whenever I was weeding the garden he would charge madly back and forth, impatiently waiting for the peace offering that was sure to appear before long. How that horse did love fresh, green grass. Especially at the end of a long, dry summer. His young master would stake him out in the field, tethered to a huge truck tire, which normally was enough to hold him in his allotted area. But it was never enough when he took it into his head that the grass on the other side was greener. I well remember the day when the tender, young grass on a neighbor's newly sown lawn was a temptation not to be resisted. And there he was, pulling the grass up by the roots, leaving holes in the soft earth with every step he took, and making an absolute shambles of a cherished project. His master was at school, and the boy's mother absolutely refused to have anything to do with him since the memorable occasion when he chased her right into the house. So it was up to me to save him from the just wrath of my irate neighbor. Bravely equipping myself with a carrot and followed by every goggle-eyes youngster on the block, I approached the busily munching horse. Firmly took him by the bridle with one hand, tucked the tire under the other arm, and led him away. He came docilely

enough, until we were at the paddock gate. No one can accuse Go-Go of being a dumb brute, he knew well enough he was going to be locked up, a prospect that didn't please him at all. He tossed his head, pulling bridle and tire out of my hands, and next thing I knew I was knocked against the fence, with my ankle caught between fencepost and tire. It frightened him as much as it did me, and he leaped into the paddock, the gate slammed shut and I made my way home leaning on the sturdy shoulder of my young son. I limped for weeks and vowed that Go-Go could go-go where he chose and I couldn't care less.

But I reckoned without my reputation as Go-Go's guardian angel, which was too firmly established in the neighborhood, and scarcely a week went by without a frantic S.O.S., and it no longer surprised me when I opened my door to find a strange child breathlessly informing me that "The horse is loose again."

There was the day when another neighbor, justly incensed about the havoc wrought on his lawn, attempted to chase the intruder and found himself chased on to his porch instead. When I came along, followed by my faithful entourage of small boys, Go-Go gave every indication of giving me the same reception. Now, if there was anything that horse hated, it was his weekly bath, and I knew it. Without a moment's hesitation, I grabbed up a handy garden hose and let him have the full force, straight into his dumb-founded face. Meekly he allowed himself to be led away while I positively glowed with pride.

That pride didn't last long, however. We got our first winter storm soon thereafter. Rain came down in a solid sheet of water, driven by gales of hurricane proportion. I was busily engaged in my annual pastime of securing the front door with towels to stop the rain coming under the door, putting glasses under leaks by the windows, mentally calculating how much a thorough weather stripping job would cost, when my attention was caught by Go-Go's frantic whiney. I looked out and noticed that the wind had blown his stable door shut, and there he was, head down, mane and tail drooping, practically drowning, at the lower end of the pasture. With a sign, I grabbed up my raincoat and galoshes and sloshed through the driving rain that threatened to blow me into the next county. I got as far as the stable and was wrestling with the door, when I looked up to see the monstrous form of Go-Go come bearing down on me. I got the door open just in time, when, with flying hoofs, he thundered past me and shot into his stall. I slammed the door shut and leaned against it, limp with relief, my pulses hammering. I knew he only wanted to get under cover, but there it was again. That icy, heart-stopping, unreasoning panic.

Actually, Go-Go was a beautiful animal, what is known as a Quarter Horse in rodeo circles, and his blue ribbons and trophies filled an entire wall. It was a joy and a pleasure to watch his young master put him through his paces. He would work him by the hour after school, and to watch him step sure-footedly and daintily through the intricate mazes of old tires and boxes in the corral was pure delight. His master would never allow anyone to ride or handle him. Except me. Every now and then he would come up with an engaging grin and invite me to ride Go-Go. "Ride Go-Go? Me? Are you out of your mind?" I'd cry, backing off wildly. "I'd as soon grab a tiger by the tail."

Go-Go and I preserved our armed truce for years until his master graduated from high school and went away to agricultural college, taking Go-Go with him. Every Christmas for years after I'd receive a card, picturing Go-Go and his proud owner, signed: "From your friend, Go-Go."

Any horse after that would be an anti-climax.

Job

*Everybody loved him (or so they said)
They put their feet under his table and drank his Brandy.
They clapped him on the back and said what a swell feller he was
They borrowed his lawnmower (the brand new one he hadn't tried)
and called him away from supper to fix a leaky faucet
and ran up credit at his store.*

*But when the chips were down and life was played in earnest,
where were they then, the back slappers, the fair weather friends.*

*His wife died, giving birth to a still born babe.
They shook their heads and said how sad it was
Not one thought to bring him a hot meal
when he returned from the cemetery.
When his store burned down one night they stood and watched
and slyly looked at one another and whispered: insurance.
forgetting that in his grief he neglected to pay the premium.*

*He asked for a loan at the bank and was turned down.
No collateral, they said, and shrugged their shoulders.
The banker's name was Myriad. The same fellow
he used to go hunting with.
Many's the time they sat in the duck blind together
waiting for the ducks to fly over while they talked.
They talked about their wives and children,
their hopes and dreams and ambitions and the new mayor.
But business is business.*

Miscellaneous Thoughts

Is it so inconceivable that a woman can make a home, be a mother, and yet have time to read a book or newspaper, listen to music and be a stimulating companion to her bus band?

The very women who make housekeeping a drudge and a chore are the ones who, if driven into the business world for one reason or another, are the ones who clutter up an office and make an executive clutch his hair, wish fervently the world of the [Fulix & Rolidizen] were already her, go home and snarl at his wife about the scatterbrains and incompetence of women.

There seems to be a conspiracy afoot to take women out of their natural environment. Not only do the men (bless them] expect women to be like chameleons and turn themselves into [lovers, couts], bookkeepers, mothers, etc at the drop of a [word], but to carry the analogy to the animal kingdom even further, in the end they'd like to see us fling ourselves into the fire and emerge, phoenix like, a radiant young thing to warm their old lives. Now certain factions to the sex are urging women to forget their womanliness and turn into intellectual giants. You must become another Grandma Moses or a Madam Curie, gluing your beautiful, mascaraed eye to a microscope.

Six Months of Saturdays

Disaster struck, as it always does, unexpectedly, shockingly, suddenly. Over the years my husband had risen to a high, salaried position in the Defense Industry, and now, due to cutbacks and the loss of several large contracts, which resulted in large-scale lay-offs, his department was lopped off and he was lopped off with it.

The situation didn't seem very serious at first. After all, my husband was tops in his profession with an excellent background and reputation. Surely before long he would find another niche for himself. We would tighten our belts, husband our resources.

Time, with four children to bring up and a house in the country to 'support' we had always lived right up to the limit and savings was something we planned to do in the future.

Hopefully my husband began to make contacts. Professional men don't walk into a job, they negotiate. You don't give the impression that you need the job, oh no,. As the weeks turned into months, our financial situation became more and more acute, not to say agonizing. We [homed] on our [] for even the expenses that had to be met, the mortgage payments, the insurance premiums, the bills when they fell due. Finally in desperation I plastered the town with applications and was lucky enough to find a job that at least kept us eating and daughter in college.

I combed the want ads. I write this account because it was brought home to me that the problem of the middle-aged professional man who, for one reason or another, loses his job, is very real. In a society where youth is God and must be served, where is the [machine] for accumulated experience and [] when there is no demand. What is a man to do when he has not yet reached the age of retirement yet has a family to support.

Pets Unlimited

When you have a boy in the house, animals have a way of becoming members of the family. It starts when he comes clutching caterpillars in his hot little hands and exhorts you to make a home away from home in a mason jar. You progress rapidly to polliwogs in the Spring, and well do I remember the spring when our backyard became a boarding house for polliwogs belonging to every little boy in a radius of five miles whose mothers were not as zoologically minded as I was. Truth to tell, no one watched as eagerly as I for the legs to develop and the tail to disappear, who mourned the casualties as much as I. But polliwogs at best are only transitory guests. Have you ever tried to keep a wash tub full of little frogs from leaving their happy little mud puddle and venturing out into the world? Although they cast no shadows of the events to come. Life really became exciting several years later when son gleefully bought his first white rat with his painfully saved up pocket money. One white rate is fine, it makes a dandy pet, can be carried in a pocket and whisked out to scare girls and women into hysterics at the drop of a whisker. But what do you get when you add another white rate and that one of the opposite sex? Yes, our cage finally got too small to hold the gang. My mind leaps ahead a few years and as sure as snakes shed their skins and frogs grow legs and lose tails I can see a new generation of little boys come trudging to Grandma's door begging a mason jar to house all manner of creepy, crawling creatures. And I love it.