

Take the reins

Making the decision to reignite an old passion—in this case, adding horses to the middle of your life—can either be much more complicated or much simpler than you think. It all depends on the decisions you make, and how you make them. Here are a few things to consider, a few options to ponder, and a few tips for processing this half-ton decision.

“HE’S A SWEETHEART, ISN’T HE?” I heard the voice of Susan, the buyer’s agent, behind me. “His name is Trace. Want to ride him?”

“No, that’s okay,” I replied, withdrawing my hand from the gelding’s neck.

“He’s actually sold to a friend of mine,” she continued, putting a halter on him as if I hadn’t declined her offer. “She won’t mind if you ride him, though. I was actually going to ride him in a little while, anyway. I want to make sure he is worked while they’re on vacation. I’ll just throw a saddle on him and you can hop on.”

Moments later, as I found myself putting my foot in the stirrup, I had a moment of panic. Could I even still ride? It had been 20 years since I last rode

a horse, but it really didn't seem that long. As I prepared to mount, Trace's head went straight up. I stopped.

"Oh, it's okay," Susan said, "He always does that. He's just very alert. He won't do anything. No buck, no spook, no attitude." I actually hadn't considered buck, spook, or attitude—until now.

"He looks like a giraffe," said my dad, who had joined us. I laughed and swung myself up onto this horse as if I had just ridden yesterday, noting as I did how it seemed much farther from the ground and took much more effort than it used to. I didn't really like the tension I felt in Trace's body, but, as Susan predicted, he stood perfectly still.

We moved off at a walk. For the first few moments of that first slow lap around the arena, I felt awkward—a little bit wobbly. Then I felt that old familiar connection returning. I relaxed and released a deep sigh, directly from the center of my soul. I smiled as we started moving faster. I had heard the term, "light as a feather," used to describe a horse, but had never experienced it. Suddenly, I knew exactly what that expression meant. When we moved into a lope, I laughed out loud, surprised at the sound of the purest form of joy I had emitted in a very long time.

"He's great," I said as I dismounted, grateful for the ride, and even more grateful he was already sold, because in my ecstatic state I would have bought him on the spot.

"Do you want me to see if my friend is sure she wants him?" Susan asked. "She hasn't paid for him."

Oh, dear. "Sure," I heard myself say. I stepped closer to Trace and rubbed his neck. I felt my dad's eyes on me. "Ride him," I said, answering his silent question.

Dad rode him, around and around. "I still don't like the way he carries his head," he said when he was done, handing the reins back to me. "And he has a pinchy butt."

Dad was used to the short, stocky build of cutting horses. Trace was lighter, leaner, a little short in the back, and high in the withers. And yes, I thought, as I walked around the backside of him, his hips were

more angular, kind of coming to a point at the top instead of being rounded and smooth.

I suddenly felt defensive of my new high-headed friend. Dad had never liked a single one of my boyfriends, and had no use for either of my husbands (with good reason, it turned out—I was still fresh out of a second miserable marriage). Now here he was similarly dissing this horse.

“She says you can have him if you want him,” Susan said, rejoining us.

I heard myself say, “Okay, I’ll take him.” Dad looked at me like I’d lost my mind. I knew for sure that I had either lost it or found it. Time would tell which one.

The “jumping-off place”

It goes without saying that this is *not* the smart way to buy a horse. In fact, I realized as Susan unloaded Trace at my parents’ house a few days later, the way I went about this life-altering decision was not only rushed, it was plain dangerous. I suppose in my desperation to make a change in my life and not to let horsey opportunity slip away yet again, I acted with uncharacteristic decisiveness that was as foolish as it was courageous. Regardless, I was in with both feet, and I had dragged along a 1,000-pound animal.

As you’ll see in the coming chapters, there’s a better way to embark on this horse course. We all have to find our own path, but perhaps this book will transform some of my missteps into your warning markers. This is what we affectionately call the “jumping-off place.” It’s decision time, and most of the decisions related to riding and owning horses are bigger than they look. Take your time, get a lay of the land, ask a lot of questions, and as always, let your heart be your truest guide.

More than likely, by midlife you have made plenty of big decisions. And, like most of us, there are some you’re more proud of than others. The decision to take the reins—and take control of your pursuit of your dreams and goals—is no different than any other change of course.

This time, however, with the help of a few experts in the field, you can make the decisions that will serve you best without a lot of time-

wasting missteps. (Let's face it, we've let enough time pass us by.) But moving too fast, as I did, carries its own set of challenges. Making sound decisions makes all the difference.

How do you make decisions?

From those who rely solely on "gut," to advocates of the infamous pro/con list, to those who make decisions by consensus, here's news that could rock your world. Suzy Welch, author of the bestselling decision-making treatise, *10-10-10: A Life Transforming Idea* (Scribner, 2009), explains that many of these common methods of decision-making are somewhat unreliable because they can be skewed by what she calls "neurological bias"—something that feels like "gut" but is actually your brain playing tricks on you based on past experience or observations.

According to Welch's book, following your "gut" on big decisions—or any of the other ways we usually analyze our options—can be misleading, calling into play things like fear, other people's expectations, and beliefs based on others' experiences. "At the end of the day," Welch writes, "many of our choices are so personal and so complicated that by necessity and convention, we are alone with them."

For many of us, it seems, who by this time in our life have made a number of decisions that haunt us, the fear of making the *wrong* decision can be the controlling factor. And, sometimes, even if we've made a decision that doesn't seem to be the best, we cling to it for fear of making things worse.

Welch explains that this reluctance to make a new choice is sometimes the result of what cognitive scientists call "escalating commitment," in which we refuse to acknowledge when something isn't working for fear that we're giving up too soon—or that it might get better. The way out of both scenarios and onto the road to a more authentic life is as simple as asking, "What are all the possible positive and negative consequences of staying in this mess (whatever it happens to be for you) over time?"

Welch's 10-10-10 approach to decision-making is deceptively simple. By calling upon us to consider the impact of any decision 10 minutes (short-term), 10 months (midterm), and 10 years (long-term) from now, she takes us out of the emotional state instigated by neurological bias and exposes solutions we may not have otherwise been able to visualize. Although it is certain that no one can know for sure what will happen 10 years from now, it is the act of *imagining* the possible outcomes, both positive and negative, that give us a frame of reference for our expectations and help guide us to what we most desire.

So if we take the example of my decision to buy Trace after one short ride and a spontaneous infatuation borne of, yes, perhaps a "midlife crisis" of sorts, and analyze it using the 10-10-10 technique, we might get something like this:

Should I buy this horse? If I say "Yes," this decision will affect me how?

10 minutes from now: I will still be walking on air, but starting to come down as I cut the deposit check and hand it to the agent.

10 months from now: I don't know anything about this horse, really; he might not get along with my dad's horse; he might not get along with me. I don't know how he trailers or how he goes on the trail. He might have stable vices. He might have a hidden unsoundness. I might not be able to afford special shoeing or special feed or supplements that he requires. He might not be "the one" after all, but knowing my nature, I won't be able to "give up on him," and we'll both be stuck.

10 years from now: Hopefully I'll still be fit and agile enough to get in the saddle, but if not, what else can I do with this horse? What kind of groundwork would he like? In 10 years I'll need to help my daughter pay off her college loans. Will owning a horse allow me to fulfill that commitment?

After going through the 10-10-10 process, I might ask if I can come back in a week and try Trace again, or perhaps arrange to take him on a trial basis while I crunch the numbers, do some planning, and get to know him. Welch believes that 10-10-10 is a powerful decision-making tool because by methodically sorting through possible outcomes at three pivotal time frames (short-, mid-, and long-term), the process forces us to analyze our options in the light of *who we want to become*. “If you seek a new life of clarity and intention,” she writes, “10-10-10 spurs us to deliberate, *then* act.”

▄▄▄ It’s time to sweat the small stuff

Besides the decisions that we *realize* are of life-changing magnitude, of possibly even greater threat to our path of authenticity are the little decisions we make every day that, with their 10-10-10 impact ignored, may play an ever greater role in leading us astray from our core values. Since reconnecting with our deeply held values is what “taking the reins” of our life is all about, it is worth a little space here to stop and ask if we have a good understanding of what those really are.

It seems that a key piece of making decisions that are better and truer to the calling of our authentic self would be to create a sharper and more meaningful awareness of what we value most. So before we go any further down the bridle path, let’s stop and take a few minutes to get a really clear idea of our most deeply held personal values—our “soul values.” By getting in solid touch with these, decisions you make from here on out will be much easier and better aligned with where you want to go and who you want to become.

Making room in your life for a horse

One of the biggest questions most of us face when contemplating a big life change, such as adding all that horses entail to the mix of an already busy existence, is how do we do it without making the craziness we may already

EXERCISE**Find Your Soul Values**

The widely available “Proust Questionnaire” was developed by French Memoirist Marcel Proust more than 100 years ago and still rings true today when we’re hunting our “soul values.”

- 1 Get out your notebook and answer the following questions expansively (write as much as you can, as fast as you can, for as long as you can before going on to the next one):
 - ▶ What is your idea of happiness?
 - ▶ What is your idea of misery?
- 2 Now, take a swing at the questions Suzy Welch added to the Proust Questionnaire in her book *10-10-10*:
 - ▶ What would make you cry at your seventieth birthday party?
 - ▶ What do you want people to say about you when you’re not in the room?
 - ▶ What do you love about the way your parents live(ed), and what do you hate?
- 3 Take a look at your answers and look for themes—these will help you put your finger on your “soul values” and whether having horses in your life is a part of being true to them.

be feeling worse? It can be done, but it takes some mental restructuring and flexibility, a new set of rules, and what experts call “self-management.”

▄▄▄ Prepare to give up something else

“Horses are not like boats, RVs, or motorcycles,” says Equine Massage Therapist and midlife horsewoman Emily Kutz, referring to the other kinds of “big purchases” frequently made in and around midlife. Her

path back to horses began when her neighbor's daughter shared stories of her own horseback riding lessons, and once Emily felt her old dream reawaken, she began making changes to her life to accommodate it. "People need to really understand what they're getting into when they commit to bringing a living, breathing being into their life with another set of needs, requirements, and responsibilities."

Contemporary philosopher and best-selling author Alexandra Stoddard hits the nail on the head when she tells us "You're going to have to give up something you already have or possibly, another dream . . . when you say goodbye to the weeds you didn't plant, you make room for the flowers of your choice."

▄▄▄ Practice the "art of no"

We are perhaps the last generation to grow up driven by a need to please others at the expense of pleasing ourselves. Now don't blow this out of proportion here. I'm not advocating selfishness, nor am I dogging niceness and "doing for others." But when the inability to say "No" to the requests of others, even to your own detriment, robs you of the ability to live an authentic, fulfilling life, it's time to hit the brakes and find a new way to get your "doing for others" into a healthier perspective. Here are a few tips from the experts to acquire this skill with the ultimate goal of making room in your life for your own heart's desire.

"The reason 'No' is difficult at first," writes Stoddard in her book *Making Choices* (Harper Paperbacks, 1995), "is that many of the demands made on us appear as though they are our responsibility." However, the onus is not really on us, she advises, until we say, "Yes."

Combine this sense of mislaid responsibility with the pace at which most of us are used to living—and the momentary adrenaline rush we have become addicted to when we do manage to be all things to all people—and the idea of slowing down, reflecting on our life, making new choices, and creating time and space to live out our dream may seem completely unrealistic.

"Just say 'No,'" says Stoddard. Start small. Start anywhere. Just start. Say "No" to everything in your life that isn't part of your new master plan built around your deepest personal "soul" values. "Being in a position to say 'No' is a privilege that comes with being a self-sufficient, responsible, mature, well-balanced, independent adult," writes Stoddard. What's more, she tells us, the art of saying "No," which Stoddard calls "the first bullet you'll need in your arsenal in the battle to take back your life," will:

-) Help you move away from unrealistic expectations and pressures others put on you.
-) Provide you with balance, order, clarity, discipline, restraint, and guidance.
-) Be a definitive way for dealing with the contradictions and distractions all around us.

Recognizing the power and importance of this two-letter word is only half the battle. The hard part comes in learning how to use it and still live with yourself, as well as those around you who think you've taken leave of your senses! It should be mentioned that those in your life who love and support you will toggle back and forth a bit in their approval of the "No You." It takes some readjusting on everyone's part as you learn to play life by a new set of rules.

"Bear in mind," advises Cheryl Richardson, author of *Stand Up for Your Life* (Free Press, 2003), "that there is a spiritual principle that operates in life: When you take good care of yourself, it's always in the best interests of the other person as well. [He or she] may be disappointed or angry, but it doesn't make your decision the wrong choice." She adds that when you start to practice what she calls "extreme self care" in which you honor your personal values with your choices and decisions regardless of the expectations of others, "a

Divine force rallies behind you to support your decisions and will actually make your life easier.”

Explaining that time, for all of us, is a finite gift of 168 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, Richardson cautions us not to confuse a tough choice with “no choice.” The notion of “time management, therefore, is a myth; what we must embrace instead is the discipline of “self-management.” So, to clear out an overcrowded life to make room for horses to enter requires us to follow three simple sounding (but challenging at first) instructions:

- › **Say “No”** As we’ve already discussed, this is the first step toward making time for yourself and for horses.
- › **Schedule less** If a project will take one week, say it will take two. Take an extra 15 minutes before and after appointments so you’re not rushing from one thing to the next.
- › **Don’t be afraid to cancel** “It’s hard to disappoint people,” Richardson acknowledges. “Apologize, but stick to your guns. Be gracious, direct, and don’t over-explain.”

Building Your “No” Muscle

It takes time, determination, and practice to build your “No” muscle. With that in mind, here are a few workout tips from self-help experts:

- › Take some time between receiving a request and responding to it to help break the habit of the “Automatic Yes.”
- › Let friends and family know what you’re doing and enlist their help.
- › Identify why you’re afraid to say “No.” (Are you afraid of conflict? Rejection? Missed opportunity? Regret? Guilt?) Sometimes just shining a little light of awareness on your fear puts it into a healthier perspective.

EXERCISE

Start Clearing Your Own Trail

- 1 To figure out where to start clearing the trail to your horse-filled life, track your time use in your journal for a full week. At the end of the week, group your time entries in the following categories:
 - ▶ Work
 - ▶ Sleep
 - ▶ Home (household tasks and errands)
 - ▶ People (family and friends)
 - ▶ Personal maintenance (bathing, dressing, personal appointments and tasks)
 - ▶ Self (activities that renew you mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually)
- 2 Tally the total time spent each week in each category. These numbers reveal where your priorities are right now. Is this a life of balance and joy? What adjustments do you need to make? What do you wish your priorities were?
- 3 Now reorder your priorities to reflect the “horsey” life you want to lead in terms of how you spend your time. Use this new list as your guide as you start to enforce your new set of priorities by saying “No,” scheduling less, and canceling until you reach a balance of time and choice that reflects your personal values and who you want to become in the second half of your life.

Adding time for horses into your busy life is not about cramming yet another thing into your schedule, and then killing yourself to make time for it. Echoing Richardson’s advice, Timothy Ferriss, author of the best-seller *The 4-Hour Workweek* (Crown Archetype, 2009), writes that the trick to making space in your life is found in what he calls the “wonder-

EXERCISE

Tracking the Causes of Pain and the Harbingers of Joy

- 1 In your journal, list the things that you know cause you emotional pain or discomfort. Leave plenty of space between entries. Now, writing fast, without thinking or censoring, write about the ways/situations in which you ignore your own emotional and physical health for the sake of avoiding these feelings.
- 2 Now, make a list of what makes you feel good, strong, and lifts your spirits. Write about all the ways you would incorporate these things into your regular life if you could.
- 3 Now, finally, where were you and what were you doing the last time you felt peaceful and relaxed? Describe the entire scenario, detail by detail, as if you're reliving the moment.

What you've written here provides a way to measure requests and demands on your time and your life. This is a process you now need to handle proactively if you plan to ride and own horses.

ful world of elimination." Once you've discovered what it is you want to do more of in your life, you have to figure out what you can eliminate.

▄▄▄ **Employ Parkinson's Law**

The next tool Ferriss offers is even more striking in its simplicity and power. Employing two synergistic approaches for increasing productivity known as "Parkinson's Law" ("A task will swell in [perceived] importance and complexity in relation to the time allotted for its completion"), Ferriss unwittingly gives answer to those of us looking to make enough space in our busy life for something as big as a horse. He says:

- 1 Limit your tasks to the important to shorten your work time.
- 2 Shorten your work time to limit your tasks to only the important.

Sound like he's talking in a circle? He is. The process is clear and simple: Block off time for the tasks you need to complete each day and that's it. That's all you have. With a little ironclad self-discipline and a good watch or timer, you'll learn quickly to stay focused and then move on. Can it really be that easy? If you've done the journaling and soul-searching exercises I provided in the pages leading up to this one, you already know which activities can be considered "mission critical" to the life you want to lead and which, therefore, *deserve* your focus. "If you don't identify the mission critical tasks and set aggressive start and end times for their completion, the unimportant becomes the important," Ferriss writes. And isn't that the truth we've all lived up til now?

If you've ever wondered "what happened to your day"; if writing a few emails, picking up groceries for dinner, making two phone calls, and attending a meeting leaves you exhausted; if you've worked hard all week but only crossed off one "mission critical" task from your bottomless to-do list, Ferriss' point applies to you.

▄▄▄ Derailed but not demoralized

David Allen is yet another noted expert in the field of time and productivity management. In his book, *Making It All Work* (Penguin, 2009), Allen acknowledges that choosing the path of balance and focused productivity in our volatile, high-speed world is tricky at best. And sometimes (my words, not his), shit happens. For all your careful planning and discipline, something comes along and knocks you right off your carefully laid tracks, and there you are stunned and bewildered, having to begin all over again.

The advantage of building a framework and "laying track," Allen points out, is that when you deal with life's little (or big) surprises, you

EXERCISE

Recapture Your Day

Using Ferriss' *4-Hour Work Week* as our guide, here are a few point-specific ways to pare down your to-do list and "recapture" parts of your day to devote to your "mission critical" activities (i.e. HORSES):

- 1 Create a to-do list each night of what must be accomplished the following day. Don't computerize these lists—write them out on a small notepad or 3- by 5-inch index card.
- 2 Include no more than two "mission critical" items on your list each day. Look at each one and ask, "If this is all I get done today, will I be satisfied with my day?" and "What will happen if I don't do this today?"
- 3 Identify the activities that interfere with your focus each day—you know, those things we all fall prey to (e-mail, Internet, television). Be vigilant and bust yourself whenever you drift into these areas and lose focus on the tasks on your daily list.
- 4 **DO NOT MULTITASK.** (Do you see the capitalized letters? That's me, yelling at myself.) While it's seductive and a little bit egotistical to think we're smart and talented enough to do more than one thing at a time, recent brain research indicates that multitasking leads only to brain overload and poor results in each activity. And you might as well quit this habit right now, because eventually your horse will stop it for you. Horses are the best cure in the world for multitasking.
- 5 Shorten deadlines to force your immediate, concentrated action and prevent procrastination. Your reward? High productivity and more time for the things you *want* to do. Would that be pure bliss or what?
- 6 Stop asking for opinions; instead, propose solutions. This saves hours over the course of a few months in the "What do you want for dinner?" ... "I don't know what sounds good to you?" category, alone. When you propose a solution, you incite decisive action.

have pathways and trail markers to help you get back to where you were and take the actions necessary to reorient yourself and restart. Here are a few of Allen's track-laying tips that I think can be adapted to fit most any life and set of priorities, and will prove most useful when trying make time for horses:

- 1 Create a system for handling the information coming into your life: A simple set of exact processes or routines that eliminate the need for thought.
- 2 Place physical "inbaskets" at key locations in your home, office, and car for holding information to be processed at a later time. Designate an hour a day for going through it and attending to those tasks "on deck."
- 3 Set a reminder mechanism on your calendar—online versions include audible alarms, flags, and message boxes. If you live by a wall or pocket calendar, organize a system to remind yourself of deadlines and appointments in hard copy. Colored "flags" or post-its can work well for this.
- 4 Collect any random thoughts ideas, goals, or plans in a spiral notebook for your perusal at a later date. You're less likely to waste time dwelling on them *now* if you promise them attention at in the future.
- 5 Create a dedicated workstation at home, at the office, and even in the car if you're in it a lot, to give yourself a place for thinking, planning, and making decisions about future actions.
- 6 Schedule two hours at the beginning or end of each week for a "weekly review" to regroup, refresh, refocus, and make any changes to any part of the system that's not working as it should be.

Creating time, space, and opportunity where you think there's none

If you've searched your soul and decided that although this horse thing is really something you want to pursue at this time in your life, you really and truly don't have the time, or money, or ability to commit to it, perhaps you should think again.

- › **Take one lesson a week.** Or, just one lesson a month. This isn't as much about gaining ground as a rider as it is about just getting on a horse on a regular basis and "keeping the dream alive."
- › **Make a "horse date" with yourself once a week.** Or, once a month. You can do this in addition to your monthly lesson, or in place of it, if you can't afford a trainer at this time. Use your "date" to watch a training DVD, read a horse book or magazine, or attend an online webinar. Become a student of the horse, as Dr. Deborah McCormick advocates.
- › **Go to the show!** Depending on where you live, there is probably some kind of horse event within driving distance. Just Google your favorite breed name or discipline, along with your location, and fill up your calendar! Admission is often free or minimal, and it's a great way to tap into the horse community even if you don't show, own a horse, or even ride. If you love the sight, sound, and yes the smell of horses, it can be quite a welcome mental break to just go, watch, listen, and learn. It is also an opportunity to stroll down barn aisles, meet owners and breeders, and maybe even pet a few noses (watch out for teeth).
- › **Physically unable to ride?** Join one of the many horse-related online communities now available, check out an equine encounter retreat, and find imaginative ways to be around horses and horsemanship, either in reality or in the virtual realm. You don't have to see the world from the back of your horse to enjoy exploration in his company. Disciplines such as driving, trick training, liberty work, and agility offer many options for fun without getting in a saddle.

Moving forward

Now that you have a firm grip on your decision-making process, your core values, and specific tools for recapturing time to devote to that which really matters, we can move step by step through some common issues experienced at all levels of horsemanship, hear the stories of those who've been there (and are still there today), and ask a few experts to weigh in with ideas, information and guidance for making the next leg of this important journey everything you want it to be—and more!

Horsewoman Carole Thigpen offers a final word of guidance regarding making decisions and taking charge of your life, and especially, parlaying these decisions to eventual horse ownership. "You have to make a choice," she says. "Am I going to take action on this information or not? Is there something I need to modify or change? Is there something I need to learn first? What are some baby steps I can take with this action as the eventual goal? You don't always have to do it all at once. There are almost always baby steps."

A REAL-LIFE, MIDLIFE HORSE STORY **GAIL**

During a childhood and youth growing up in the middle of Virginia's horse and cattle country, Gail says she was "horse crazy, like most young girls." She read about horses constantly and asked for a horse every Christmas. As luck would have it, the new family who moved into the farmhouse nextdoor brought her an opportunity beyond her wildest dreams.

The new neighbors all rode, including two daughters. Their mother volunteered to host Pony Club events at the farm and soon became a District Commissioner for the organization. The family was kind enough to offer Gail a retired show pony to ride if she wanted to be involved in Pony Club,

and Gail took them up on it, spending many gloriously happy hours acquiring a broad foundation in horsemanship.

Her youth was filled with Friday afternoon riding lessons, trail riding for hours with friends or alone, and, sometimes, foxhunting with some of the local hunt clubs. Each hunt had a distinct personality, Gail explains. Some were more formal, some more youth-friendly, and some quite challenging over rougher terrain.

Gail's first horse was a Thoroughbred named Richard—a “big forward-moving, strapping horse.” Her father, impressed with the horse's looks and demeanor, insisted on buying Richard for her (her father didn't ride). Gail was never completely sure she could handle Richard, was never able to relax on him, and as a result, rarely hunted on him.

Her father meant well, but Gail's early horse ownership taught her a very important lesson: “*You, the rider, must be comfortable with the horse you get. It only matters what others think about a horse when they are trying to talk you out of buying a particular horse. You are the one who has to live with the horse, usually for a long time.*”

During and after college, Gail worked at various Thoroughbred training facilities, here and abroad, “galloping” young horses. She returned home to Virginia to finish up school, and eventually, the lure of a career in the travel industry took hold. She cut back on riding, then stopped altogether as corporate life ruled.

Fast-forward a few decades of real life. Gail and her husband were living in Texas. She still worked in travel when first her father, then her mother passed away. Like so many of us during pivotal times, Gail needed to find meaning in a new phase of life. She wanted to do something just for herself—something no one else, including her husband, was part of... something that took her back to who she *used* to be. Her thoughts, of course, turned to horses.

When she spied an advertisement for a local event, Gail rounded up a couple friends and went to watch. She ended up serving as a jump judge for the cross-country phase because there weren't enough volunteers, and the ball began to roll. She took a few lessons, talked to a lot of people, and before she knew it, she was looking for a horse.

Because of her history with racehorses, Gail was interested in off-the-track Thoroughbreds (OTTBs). She was perusing the LOPE (LoneStar Outreach to Place Ex-Racers) Web site when she found Jamaica Bet, a retired Thoroughbred with a bowed tendon. She says she liked the sweet look on his face and knew how to care for and rehabilitate bowed tendons (and for the kind of riding she was planning to do, she knew it wouldn't be a problem).

Even though several knowledgeable people tried to talk Gail out of buying Jamaica Bet, the vet check concurred with her opinion on the tendon, and \$1,000 later, Gail had herself a horse. "We got along well from the start," Gail says of her relationship with Jamaica. "He's an affectionate and social horse, and nothing much bothers him. He's been around, is well-traveled, and at seven years old, is over the three-year-old 'stupid.'"

So Gail found, in Jamaica Bet, exactly what she was looking for. Just enough challenge to provide stimulation and distraction from life's cares ("You have to be alert when working around *any* horse," she says, "which gets your mind off of tension-causing issues!"), and just enough calm to soothe her soul ("It calms me to go out and work with him," she says. "I trust him and I think he trusts me.")
