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Instructor's Name

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Date

### Arkansas State Championship Horse Show

The Arkansas State Championship Horse Show is held every year on Labor Day weekend at Barton Coliseum in Little Rock. When I competed in 2003, this show was a combination of fear, excitement, and fun for me. The fun of riding and the excitement of competition counteracted the fear of failure or injury. Horseback riding has always been one of my favorite hobbies, so that weekend of nothing but horse competitions was like heaven to me.

This show featured over thirty events, with a combination of speed, pleasure, and show events. The top five riders from twelve different associations performed in each event. I was a member of the West-Ark association, and I was one of the sixty riders in the state that was competing.

That year I performed in three different events, my favorite of which was Junior Speed. Junior Speed was run on Sunday, about mid-morning, but I got out of bed extremely early because I was very restless. When my mom and I got to the arena, I went to feed my horse. The sharp smells of hay and coffee hit my nose as soon as I entered the barn. The only sounds were the occasional stomp of an impatient hoof. After Cougar, my horse, had eaten some feed, I saddled him up. The stiff leather saddle let out a sleepy squeak as I lifted it up and tightened it down on his back.

After Cougar was saddled, I took him down to the warm-up barn to lope him around and loosen his tired and sore muscles. I had been in the barn about an hour when I heard the call for West-Ark riders to come to the arena. Everything that I had been training for over the past year

came down to this one ride that would be over in less than ten seconds. One mistake or misstep and my time wouldn't be good enough to place. There were sixty competitors, but trophies are given to only the top ten.

My nerves caused my head to hurt and my stomach to churn. As I led Cougar up to the back of the arena, I could feel the eyes of my competitors on my back, all daring me to make a mistake and not have a good run.

Cougar began to prance impatiently, and the sound of his iron shoes sliding on the slick asphalt sent chills up my spine. As I entered the small metal box at the back of the arena, I could hear the crowd inside roaring. As I rode up close to the arena entrance, the piercing sunlight gave way to the dull arena lights, and the hazy fog that seemed to cover everything like a film enveloped me.

People crowded against the rails of the alley, cheering and yelling. Cougar could feel my nervousness and began to prance and jump nervously around in a circle. As the tractors made their last circle and cleared the arena, the announcer called my name. Suddenly my mind began to clear. The smells, sounds, and people faded away, and all I could see was the barrel at the far end of the arena. I started to focus on my run and what I had to do.

As Cougar pranced around toward the entrance, I gave him a kick, and we took off like a bullet from a gun. As we ran toward the barrel, the only sounds I heard were my own heartbeat and the sound of Cougar's feet pounding on the powdery dirt. As I leaned in for the sharp turn around the barrel, I felt Cougar's feet slide beneath him. I frantically pulled up on the reins, trying to pull him back onto his feet. After what seemed like an eternity of dangling in midair, he finally pulled himself back up and took off.

My mom later told me that it looked as if he went down to his knees on the front end, but his back end never stopped running. As we scrambled away from the barrel, the fear of hitting

the ground left me, and the roar of the crowd hit me like a wave.

As we entered the box, I began to shut Cougar down. Dirt flew around us, and I could hear large clumps of mud banging against the walls at the back. Although the fear of falling on the turn around the barrel had left me, I still felt shaky as we skidded and bounced to a stop inches before the gate. What felt like an eternity of sliding around the barrel lasted only 8.282 seconds. I hurriedly jumped off Cougar and examined his legs where he had hit the ground, but he didn't seem to be injured.

I began to walk him around in circles, to help slow his breathing and cool him down. Sweat streamed down his neck and dripped from his belly, and his nostrils flared with a combination of heat and dust. His legs shook with exhaustion, and his eyes bulged with a combination of fear and excitement.

As the last association began to enter the box for their try at glory, I learned that I sat in ninth place. However, three of the five riders from the last association outran me. As the announcer began to call the names of the top ten riders, I could feel the burn of defeat inside of me. One single slip had cost us the top ten. Once again, we were going home without a trophy.

Still I was happy. That single slip could have badly injured or killed me and the horse, and twelfth place out of sixty riders is not bad at all. I later found out that the winning time was a 7.764, so I was only one-half of a second away from winning.

Definitely the Arkansas State Championship Horse Show was an exciting and fun event for me that year. I got to compete in my favorite events and try to win a trophy. A combination of fear and nervousness kept my stomach churning, but I also experienced the sheer pleasure of riding and the pride of being one of the top sixty competitors in Arkansas.