

The Jump

by Lisa Wysocky

From one hundred yards away Rose knew Callie was in trouble. It was something about the way she walked, how she held her hands. As she got closer, Rose could see the desperation in Callie's eyes.

"Oh, you've got to help me," Callie pleaded, grasping Rose's arm.

"Well, I will if I can," Rose replied calmly, keeping her curiosity at bay.

"I need to borrow Bill . . . there's only one entry. I can't believe it. I've hauled two-hundred miles and there's only one entry," Callie wailed. "Oh, please let me borrow Bill."

Callie jumped. Or at least her horses did. She was just starting to promote her latest protégé, a big boned gray gelding who jumped so well Callie joked that he had leap frogs for ancestors. Unfortunately, horse show rules stated there must be at least two horses in a class for the first place winner to receive a point. And that's what everyone is after in the show business—the never-ending pursuit of points. Enough points in a class guaranteed you entry into the world championships, not forgetting that it also raised the value of your horse.

So, Rose reasoned, if there was only one horse in the class, Callie had hauled half-way across the state for nothing. And Bill, like Callie, or Callie's horses, jumped. Bill, by the way, was a schooling horse Rose sometimes brought along and let her stable help show, just for fun. A nine-year-old, 16-hand roan gelding, Bill was very versatile and tried hard for each student.

"Sure," Rose answered agreeably, "as long as it doesn't interfere with any of Bill's other classes."

"Oh thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I'll pay his entry fee and just refuse him at the first jump. He doesn't have to complete the course, just go in the gate and be disqualified."

Fine. Rose was glad to help. They made

arrangements with the proper officials for the tack changes that had to be made at the gate just prior to the class, and it was set.

Has it been mentioned yet that Bill was a wimp? From the time he was born, Bill stepped hesitantly into life and he had presented a dubious front from then on. It took two years to teach him to load into a horse trailer. Not that he wasn't willing, he just wasn't sure it was the right thing to do. So Rose would pick up each foot, one by one, and place it in the trailer. When all four feet were inside, at the very edge of the trailer ramp, she'd carefully nudge Bill's rear further into the trailer with her shoulder. Bill would glance back, sigh, splay out his feet for balance and prepare himself for the worst.

So it went with everything Bill did. He was careful, considerate, steady and thoughtful. Never flashy or brilliant, but always correct. During his show career Bill won many times by default. He rarely made a mistake and what he lacked in style he more than made up for in consistency.

Steady old Bill. There were few things Bill wouldn't tolerate so Rose couldn't really blame herself if she forgot to tell Callie that Bill was terrified of whips. Or that, like his dam, he was impossible to turn away from a jump. He felt it was his solemn duty to go over it.

"He's really not used to fences this tall," Rose explained to Callie after looking at the three-foot six-inch jumps. "He does two-foot-six fine, three-feet with some of the better students. I've never really asked him for more. I've never needed to."

It was all right, Callie explained. She'd just circle once, approach the fence, the fence would look too high for Bill and he'd stop. Repeat the process twice and Bill would be disqualified. Callie's gray, having completed the course, would earn the point. Easy as pie.

Except that things are never that easy.

Callie and the gray went in and had a clean

round until the sixth fence, an upright with a bright, multi-colored bullseye painted on it. The gray came to a screeching halt, backed up a few steps and snorted at the abomination that had the gall to call itself a jump.

Callie settled herself deep in the saddle, gathered her reins and tried again. This time, despite a zig-zag approach and a half halt in front of the jump, the gray decided to go over and the rest of the round was finished cleanly. She came out of the gate reasonably satisfied.

"We've got three minutes," Callie gasped, motioning with her head to the stopwatch the gate man held in his hand.

"It's okay, we'll do it," Rose said. "Plenty of time."

They swapped out saddles and boosted Callie up with at least a minute to spare.

"Oh," Rose called after her, "you won't need those spurs."

Rose reached over the fence to pull them off and never even saw the whip.

Callie started her circle at a trot, getting a quick feel of Bill. It was hard not to notice that his head was up and his eyes were rolling. Sure signs of distress for old Bill. It wasn't until Callie closed the circle and nudged Bill into a canter that Rose noticed the whip.

"Oh my! Callie! Drop the whip." Rose yelled to her. But Callie was concentrating on other things. Like how to pull Bill up now that he was accelerating toward the first fence.

Poor Bill, eyes bulging, nostrils snorting, couldn't make up his mind what to do. You could see the wheels spinning in his brain as he weighed the pros and cons of going over the fence.

I know I should go over it, but on my back she's telling me not to, and there's the whip and I'm afraid she'll use it on me and then it'll hurt, and I've always been taught to go over it if it's in front of you and here it is but it's so big, Oh dear.

Bill duplicated the gray's zig-zag approach. Callie, while not aggressively hauling in on the reins, was also not giving Bill any encouragement to jump. So Bill galloped his crooked approach,

executed a half halt, then changed his mind and leapt over the fence on all fours.

Callie was not the only one who was astounded.

"Atta boy Bill!," Rose yelled. "I didn't think he could jump that high," she shouted to the gate man. "He really did it."

In the mean time, Callie had started to gather her reins, but not before old Bill saw the second fence dead ahead. He started trotting towards it, hesitated just a moment, then cleared it by a foot and a half.

"All right Bill!" roared the gate man. Bill even drew a round of applause from the audience on that one.

Callie, however, was not faring so well. She'd lost her stirrups and had no contact with her reins. She was sitting in front of the saddle, her arms half wrapped around Bill's neck. As Bill trotted around the corner, she managed to put her seat to rights, but in the process bumped her whip on Bill's shoulder.

Well from that point on, there was no turning back. Bill heaved and lumbered and scrambled himself over every jump. The audience, thrilled at this unexpected form of entertainment, got into the act.

"Jump, Bill. Jump!" they shouted, a stride or two before each fence. Encouraged by this strong show of support, Bill gamely did his best, partly out of a misguided fear of what would happen if he didn't, partly out of his ingrained sense of duty. Callie somehow managed to stay on to complete the course, which was finished to a standing ovation and a thunder of shouts and whistles. No touches. No knockdowns. Definitely not the ideal go, but Bill had won the ribbon and the point.

"Oh, Callie, I am so sorry," Rose moaned as she helped Callie slide wearily off Bill. "I know you wanted the point for the gray. I'm just so sorry. I never in the world thought this would happen."

Callie turned her face into Bill's saddle and her shoulders started shaking.

Oh man, now she's going to cry, Rose thought, and tried to comfort her by putting her hand on Callie's back. The shaking was now

accompanied with big gulps and choking sounds Rose took to be sobs.

"Callie, please, don't cry. I'm sorry. I know how much this meant to you."

Callie slowly turned, tears streaming down her face.

"Cry!," she gasped. "Cry! Why . . . that's the funniest thing that's ever happened to me. What a round! Did you ever see such a thing?"

Well, no, Rose admitted, she hadn't. Then the relief that Callie wasn't mad hit Rose and she started to giggle.

"Even from his back I could see his eyes bug-ging out of his head," Callie laughed.

"Oh, and did you see the way he did the fifth . . . sideways!"

They laughed and chortled hysterically until the gate man mentioned they were in the way of the incoming class, whereupon they moved outside the arena and continued their giggling for another ten minutes.

Other than to recite Bill's tale to several of his students back home at the barn, Rose didn't give the story another thought until the next show, three weeks later. While she was in the show office picking up her numbers she glanced at the class sheets and saw, with great relief, that there were seven entries in the open jumper class.

"Good," she thought. "Now Callie will have a real class for her gray."

So Rose was quite surprised when Callie appeared at her tack room the morning of the jumping.

"Dare I ask if Bill is here?" Callie asked, almost shyly.

"Yes, he's here. But did you know there are seven entries? That's a good class, Callie."

A one point class," Callie replied. "But," she added in a rush, "if there are eight entries it'd be two points. That's where the cut off is."

Callie went on to explain that since the gray didn't get the point she'd expected at the last show, that maybe she could make up for it with two points here.

"Have you looked at the course," Rose asked?

She certainly didn't want Bill traumatized, as he had been the last time out. And no whips!

"Yes, it's much easier, really. The arena's smaller but the ground is pretty hard, so the steward said all the jumps would have to be lowered to three-feet to start. He was afraid they'd all get too high before we were done—all us great jumpers," she laughed.

So Rose agreed. She felt she owed Callie something for Bill winning the last time.

Due to the late entry, Bill was last in the draw. Six of the other seven horses went round passably well, except for the fourth jump where most had some trouble or other.

"It's the lighting there," Callie explained after the gray knocked its top rail off. "See," she pointed, "coming from that corner over there it's real dark at the base of the jump and the horses can't see the ground line. They don't know when or where to jump. Pretty poor on the part of the steward not to catch that," she commented as she jumped nimbly onto Bill's saddle.

As one horse had completely demolished the course, proving that it wasn't exceptionally easy, Callie had decided to let Bill do his thing.

"Surely he won't get through it," she said confidently.

But there was a marked difference in Bill this time when he and Callie, sans whip and spurs, entered the arena. This time Bill entered to an explosion of applause.

"It's Bill," someone cried.

"It's the horse from the last show!" cheered another.

Bill and Callie circled to loud chants of 'Bill, Bill, Bill, Bill'. They approached the first fence at an easy canter, a brown coop that Bill wasn't sure he liked the looks of. Bill demonstrated his feeling by slowing to a trot, then a jog.

Without the whip, Rose was certain that Bill would stop. But a couple of strides before the jump, Bill noticed the audience. Wheeling to the left to look at them, Bill's eyes once again grew to saucer-like proportions. His ears flicked back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Decision time. Raising his head, he wheeled back to face

the jump, snorted loudly and clambered over the fence. Flicking his tail he set off for the next, a low oxer, got in too close, reared up and leapt like a rabbit to the other side. Callie almost came off on that landing, but before she could decide to bail out, Bill was off to the next fence.

By this time the crowd was in a frenzy. "Jump, Bill, Jump. Jump, Bill, Jump," they chanted. And Bill, eyes rolling, leapt and scurried and hoisted his twelve-hundred pounds. across the top rail of each jump, one after the other, with at least a foot to spare.

"Bill, Bill, Bill, Bill," shouted the crowd. Once again Bill had won.

Callie called Rose several weeks later.

"Did you see it? Did you see it?" she screamed into the phone.

"No, what?" Rose mumbled. The phone had awakened her from a rare afternoon nap and she was still groggy with sleep.

"The national point standings. Bill is in the top five in the nation!"

This was ridiculous. Bill was a schooling horse—a gentle, quiet animal who tried to get through life without offending anyone. Bill was not a national caliber jumper. Granted, we were not dealing with the American Horse Show Association here, just breed shows, but still. This was truly quite incredible.

"Anyway," gushed Callie, "the reason I'm calling is that I'd like to campaign Bill this year instead of the gray. I know," she interrupted before Rose could start, "you need Bill for lessons. But I'll come out a few times a week to school him and pay for his expenses to and from the shows. It's still early in the season, but the gray is already out of it, and I'd like to have a shot at the world championships this fall."

Well, she talked Rose into it. The only concern she had was the fact that Bill's legs had had some swelling after the last show, impact stress from jumping on the arena's hard surface, she guessed correctly. Rose called her local vet, and they put Bill on special supplements to minimize the extra stress and started using liniment and

supportive wraps on his legs.

The season went on in much the same fashion as in the spring. Callie came out a few times a week and put Bill over a few jumps and by and by Bill became less and less spastic in his attempts. He never, however, became fluid in anything over three-feet. But Rose began to notice a new energy in Bill, a purpose he'd never had before. Prior to this year, Bill viewed life with resignation, grateful for the small favors it could bestow upon him. But now, she discovered, Bill was actually looking forward to his sessions with Callie. He was happy. There was purpose to his days. Bill liked to jump.

By late summer, Bill and Callie had earned enough points to compete in the world championships in October.

"Oh, Callie, listen," said Rose. "Let's be realistic. Bill is at least a hand shorter than anything else that will be there and the jumps will be enormous." In other words, he hadn't any more chance than a mud fence of winning a title.

"I don't care, I just want to experience it. I want to be there and be a part of it," Callie replied. "You're going anyway, please let Bill and me come, too."

Callie was not new to national and world shows. She had quite a good reputation across the country and had won several national titles in amateur and open competitions in the past few years, despite the fact that jumping was just beginning to catch on in their part of the country. Rose remembered the new light in Bill's eyes, and so, of course, Bill and Callie came.

Callie and Bill arrived standing seventh in the nation. Bill's legs had been troubling him some, but he withstood the trip well and seemed to enjoy all the excitement. There were twenty-six horses entered and Rose just prayed that her team wouldn't disgrace themselves too badly. But Bill's reputation had preceded him and he entered the huge arena, minus any kind of whip or spur, to thunderous applause.

Looking at Bill from the stands, you could tell he was having the time of his life. He knew he was the star of the show—at least for the moment.

He threw his tail over his back and pranced a few clumsy steps before pricking his ears at the three-foot-nine and four-foot jumps and setting to work.

If nothing else, Bill had determination. He tried. Rose would certainly give him that. You could see him willing himself over each jump. When riders first learn to jump, almost all of them are told to throw their heart over the fence and go over after it, and that's exactly what Bill was doing. Oh, he still got in too close to some and popped over others, landing on all four feet at the same time. He grunted and groaned and lumbered and heaved his way over each obstacle to the best of his ability. If only we all had such determination.

"Jump Bill Jump, Jump Bill Jump!" the sound was deafening, the crowd on their feet.

Bill and Callie's round was not clean, but it was surprisingly good—good enough to earn them a seventh place ribbon, which was an achievement Rose never dreamed possible. They hosed Bill down after all the picture taking and doused his legs with liniment, rubbing it in heartily, and finished with a set of bright blue leg wraps.

"He wouldn't hold up for another year," observed Callie quietly as they walked Bill back to his stall.

"No," Rose agreed. "He wouldn't."

"Do you think . . . maybe this was too hard on him? You know, I was just thinking of myself all this time. I wanted to be here. I wanted to compete. I didn't think of Bill. Not really. Maybe," Callie said, looking at Rose, "you should have discouraged me more."

Maybe. But then Rose told Callie how she had watched Bill grow over the summer, and how she was convinced that it was an experience that Bill would never forget. He loved the crowd. He loved to jump. He even loved Callie. This year had given him purpose. And now, for the first time in his life, he would have something to think about in his retirement years. Something to tell the young colts. Something to dream about as he napped under an old oak tree.

And Rose wouldn't have taken that away from him for all the world.

Author's Note: The Jump is based on a real event. Bill was used as a schooling horse for several more years, then moved to a family with three little girls. Bill taught all three to jump, and competed with them successfully at local and regional shows. Please check back at www.powerofhorses.com for new stories periodically throughout the year.

About the Author: Born and raised in Minnesota, Lisa Wysocky had early success on the national and world championship horse show circuit. She soon was asked to begin speaking and writing about horses. A knee injury cut short Lisa's career as a trainer, but she quickly ventured into music. Six years with Nashville's afternoon paper, the *Nashville Banner*, and her reputation in the music industry as a writer of quality biographical and promotional material, piloted Lisa to a career in public relations.

Recently, Lisa served as general manager of the independent record label, Scarlet Moon Records, and authored the *only* book about country music stars and their horses, *The Power of Horses: True Stories from Country Music Stars*, which features true horse stories and original photos from 18 of country music's top artists. A mystery, *The Opium Equation*, is due out in 2003. Lisa is also active in assisting clients with their public image and with their interview skills.

A witty, down-to-earth speaker, Lisa gives her audiences 'news they can use', along with step-by-step advice on how they can create their own success stories.

Also by Lisa Wysocky

The Power of Horses: True Stories from Country Music Stars

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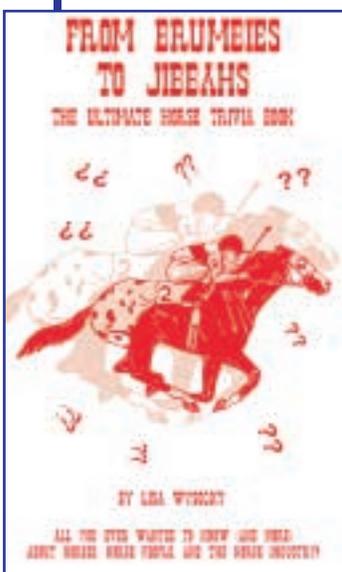
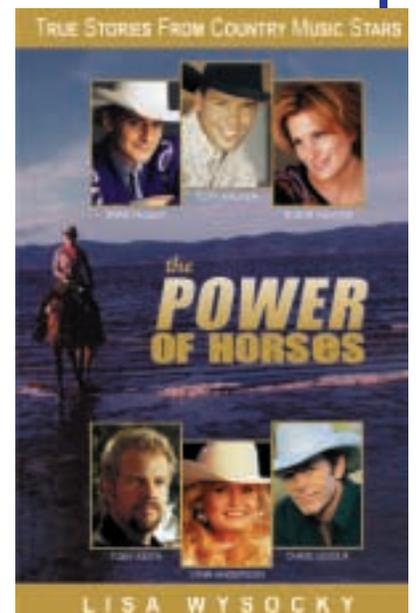
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