

In the movie *Seabiscuit*, trainer Tom Smith rescues a horse that is past his prime, and seems useless to the racing world. Why? “You don't throw away a whole life just 'cause he's banged up a little.”

Two horses rescued by Lost and Found recently provided irrefutable proof of the verity of that statement one week in Lexington, Kentucky. L.J., an ex-racehorse, and Gabby, rescued from a meat truck, made a twelve hour crusade to Kentucky as part of the Maryland Region show-jumping team for the United States Pony Club 50th anniversary and national championships. Unlike the historical crusades, Gabby and L.J. returned victorious.

At one point in their lives, although it now seems ludicrous, L.J. and Gabby were both considered unwanted and useless. Then Lost and Found entered their lives, enabling Tranquillity Manor Farms to adopt Gabby, and myself to adopt L.J. In the years since their adoption, both have been immensely successful in pony club and local hunter show circuit events.

On July 11th, 2004 at the Maryland Region show jumping rally, both represented Elkridge Harford Hunt Pony Club, myself riding L.J., and fellow pony clubber Lauren Marshall riding Gabby (other rescue horses competed but did not qualify for nationals: Jet, Stone, Player, and Swirl). After the first two rounds, Lauren and I were discouraged, believing that dropped rails would disqualify us from journeying to Kentucky Horse Park for nationals this year. However, after completing rare clean rounds in the challenging third course, Lauren and I found that we were qualified for Kentucky after all!

We would have to leave for nationals only a week afterwards, and started to prepare frantically. We almost had cause to panic when L.J. was sore indefinitely late in the week, but (by some miracle) he was cured by an Acupuncture session on Saturday. Lauren gave us a scare as well, by straining her back while practicing jumping on Gabby, but her problems were cured by the miracle of Advil.

After the turbulence of the prior weeks, I often felt the urge to pinch myself on the drive down to Kentucky. L.J. and Gabby traveled well, journeying 12 hours with no fuss (you'd have to ask our mothers, who were selfless enough to drive, if Lauren and I lived up to the same standard). The reality still hadn't set in when we drew closer to Lexington. A water tower painted with bucolic scenes of horses proclaimed “Horse Capital of The World.” I was almost surer I was dreaming when we turned into the park, passing the “Kentucky Horse Park” sign at the entrance I've seen on T.V., watching the Rolex.

Although we arrived Monday night, rounds didn't start until Wednesday. We got Gabby and L.J. settled while waiting for the rest of team to arrive, Ellen Halle and our Stable manager Christa Lynn Innerst from Greenspring Hounds Pony Club, and Lisa LeVan from Central Penn Pony Club. Lauren and I sometimes passed time by taking the horses walking or grazing—on the Rolex cross-country course. We were able to breathe easier after both horses passed Jogs on Tuesday, and cheered excitedly for the Maryland Region during opening ceremonies Tuesday night.

On Wednesday, our team performed flawlessly over two different rounds of fences, accumulating zero faults after the worst score was dropped (the only score to drop was mine from the second course, making the pilot error of taking too much time, causing six time faults). In pony club, Horse Management is scored as well. Before each of our rounds, we underwent Formal Inspections, meticulous evaluations of our presentation and cleanliness—out of the four of us, the only fault was a quarter of a point. At the day's end, we were winning overall (riding and horse management faults combined) by about a point, and tied for second in Horse Management, out of 22 teams competing at our level.

The second day's two courses proved much more demanding, in design and footing. There were heavy storms and rain the night before and in the morning, causing sloppy, messy footing despite an hour's delay. To provide an additional challenge, the first course of the day was judged for equitation (the rider's form and effectiveness). Our team was slightly disheartened because we amassed a number of faults on the second course. Lauren and Gabby dropped two rails along with teammate Lisa LeVan, and L.J. and I dropped one, each rail adding four faults. We thought that we would surely be out of first place, until we saw the updated standings. We had only 9 faults, and some change, while the next lowest team had about 20. Our equitation scores, which are converted to decimals and subtracted from the overall faults, helped as well. Lauren, with .84 subtracted had the third highest, and I, with .87, had the second highest out of over 80 competitors! Our other two teammates did not place but still contributed, with scores in the .5 range.

The third day was the most exciting, with one final round, and clear rounds eligible to complete a timed jump-off. I was the last rider to go in my team's division that day and I knew going in that our team could not be defeated—my three teammates had all gone clear! I knew that it didn't matter how I did in this round, because my score could be dropped anyways, but I was still determined to do my best. My determination paid off, and I had a clear round as well! To ice the cake, our jump-offs were fast too, with each team member earning faults subtracted for placing in the top ten. At that point, we knew that we had won the overall competition, but weren't sure about Horse Management.

Scores at first only showed that we were tied for first, with .25 of a point, but a tiebreaker proved our team supreme. We were tied with the White Mountain region, and defied all tiebreakers except for the last one—the number of exceeds standards on our formal inspections. With nine exceeds standards, our team was again hard to beat.

Driving home in a truck full of blue ribbons and prizes, I thought that I might still be sleeping and dreaming. Two horses, once unwanted and endangered, had dominated a prestigious national competition. As I kiss my horse on his soft muzzle (a goodbye tradition for the two of us) and walk back to the car, I know that this is not a dream. My experience was a reality, because even while Lauren, Gabby, L.J., and I had been living a “dream,” horses just as wonderful as L.J. and Gabby are neglected, mistreated, or walk into slaughterhouses. Such things don't happen in dreams. But maybe with horses like L.J. and Gabby proving the worth of rescue horses in general, the horse industry can abandon its cruelty and nightmares, and develop into a hopeful reality.