

Things that could only happen to Peck.



My Love Affair with Linda

Growing up in Cleveland, Mississippi, as a kid I always wanted a horse. I wanted to ride horses so bad that on my way home from school every day, I stopped my bike in a pasture where horses were stabled. I would feed grass to the horses, and sometimes a piece of apple from my lunch or a lump of sugar that had been tossing around in my pocket all day. Then, I would jump on them without saddle or a bridle and ride until they threw me off. I needed my own horse really bad!

By the time I was 11-years old, I must have asked my dad a million times to please buy me a horse. Many times, he would get his checkbook and write me a check for one million dollars and say, "go get a horse, son." My aunt and uncle even gave me a saddle they bought on their vacation to Mexico, but I didn't have the horse yet. The saddle sat on the arm of the sofa in our living room for several months. I would get on it every day and wish that I had a horse.

My dad drove an 18-wheeler truck at that time, and he happened to be in Ohio when someone offered to sell him a horse. My dad brought this horse, named Linda, all the way from Ohio in the back of the trailer. We unloaded the horse in my front yard that night and tied her outside my bedroom window until we could find a place to keep her.

Very early the next morning, I looked out my window and, "gasp," my horse was gone!! I heard a loud commotion, and found my dad, mother, my sister, my uncle and the milkman (yes, we had men that delivered milk back then) all chasing this horse up and down the streets of my neighborhood at five in the morning.

We found out later that Linda was a show horse and she knew nothing about jumping a ditch or a curb, so she stayed in the streets. We finally caught Linda and took her out to a country farm which would be her home for a while. Cleveland was a small town, so I could ride my bicycle out to where she was and ride her all around the cotton fields and countryside. There was one real problem with Linda. She would not jump a ditch. If a horse can't jump ditches in the country, then your riding area is limited. When my dad came out to watch me ride, I told him, "Linda will not jump a ditch."

My dad knew nothing about horses, but he did know something about loading cows in an 18-wheeler. He went to his

pickup truck and got a Hot Shot stick and a whip and said, "I'll make this horse jump a ditch." The Hot Shot was a battery powered shocker—a cattle prod. There was a big ditch close by, but I was thinking more of trying to find a small ditch for the first jump. My dad decided that the big ditch would work just fine. Linda is doing a back and forth motion, not wanting to jump the ditch and my dad is poking her with the cattle prod and using the whip. Linda was moving around so much, backing up, bucking and kicking, that I got get hit with the whip, enough to make me cry. I asked my dad to stop.

Finally, and suddenly, Linda decided that the cattle prod and whip were worse than a leap of faith. Holding her head high, she took a powerful jump and made it across the ditch. Surprised and unready for the leap, I almost fell off. After that ditch-jumping session, I never asked my dad to help me with horses again, but from that day forward, Linda would jump any ditch, without hesitation. This was the beginning of a long relationship with horses.