

Play Misty for Me

by Denise Jacobs



One fall day in 1967, my first year in Northern Michigan, my sophomore year of high school, I came home from school to find Misty, a huge buckskin mare. She was way past her prime, but we city slickers went on to breed her two times before her uterus collapsed.

The first week of Misty's arrival, Dad looped a rope around Misty's neck and held it as he walked her. Then, I held the rope and walked alongside Dad. We were taking no chances.

The following week my father put reins on Misty, hefted me onto her back, and walked us around the barnyard.

We did this every day for a week before Dad introduced me to the saddle and showed me how to put it on Misty and walk her around. This routine lasted several days. Next, I was allowed to mount the saddled horse and ride her around the barn, my father leading us first before giving me the reins. As I rode Misty around the barn, my Dad stayed nearby, mending fences or cleaning out the chicken shed.



The barnyard rides continued until the day my father unexpectedly opened the gate to the back 30 acres, and I was allowed to ride Misty to my heart's content as long as I stayed on our property. Not long after that, Dad opened the gate to the dirt road and let me ride to its end, about a mile away. By spring, I was able to ride anywhere I wanted in the small village of 500 people.

I used to rush home from school, saddle Misty, and ride her back to school before the teachers left for the day. I made a habit of riding by classroom windows and startling teachers as they hunched over their desks to grade papers.

If I kept going behind the school, I would find myself riding parallel to the oldest part of the village cemetery with its shady tree-lined fence. When Dad died in 1970, I chose a plot for him in that forgotten corner of the cemetery, but I never forgot my father or the care he took implementing his grand gestures.